LISTEN UP, YOU PRIMITIVE SCREWHEADS!!!!

REFEREE

PLAYER

The Unexpurgated Cyberpunk® Referee's Guide

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A FEW GRUMPY WORDS FROM THE EDITOR:

This book has been coming for a long time.

I mean that the same way that a person will look at the bad luck of someone they don't like, and say "That guy's had it coming for awhile."

When I took over this line some years ago, the sort of questions we got were along the practical side. "If Bob does X, can I do y? It doesn't say anything about it in the book." A good question, because no rules can be complete; players can (and will) come up with some creative situations. That sort of question began to diminish as the rules went into later editions and we published more supplements. The holes were plugged, and people's questions were answered.
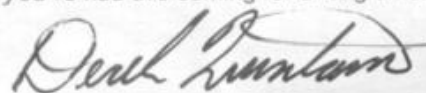
It was the questions that began to follow that were the unusual ones: people whose games had gotten out of control, whose players were out-thinking them, who were trying to get the "official" answer to a game procedure, because they thought that was the only way to do something (and enforce some kind of order). My opinion on "official" procedures is simple: if the game is some kind of tournament with money and prizes riding on the outcome, then standard rules are important. Otherwise, RTG isn't looking over your shoulders, kids. You paid the 20+ bucks, you can do what you like.

I began to wonder where these peoples' willpower, flexibility, and creativity had gone...

One thing that starting a gaming career using original "white-box D&D™" will teach you: you are running the game, you are telling the story; there is no one telling you how something should be run, because there is no "should be." The very nature of role-playing is that it is innovative, it is make-believe; if there is nothing written down, make it up yourself. Hell, if it's written down and you don't agree, change it to what you want.

The purpose of this book is to restore innovation and creativity, not by rote dogma "you must do X, y, Z for a successful game," but by inspiring through example. What follows is a product of some of the cleverest *Cyberpunk* writers and referees I know, showing how they've run and played their games (some have been at it for as long as the game's been around), hoping that their example will show you the way do it better (and have more fun, to boot).

So buy the book. Use your mind. Take control.
You've had this coming for a long time.

Derek Quintanar

Derek Quintanar

Congratulations to Mike and Lisa Pondsmith on the birth of their first son, Cody Kevin Pondsmith, born March 5th, 1994.

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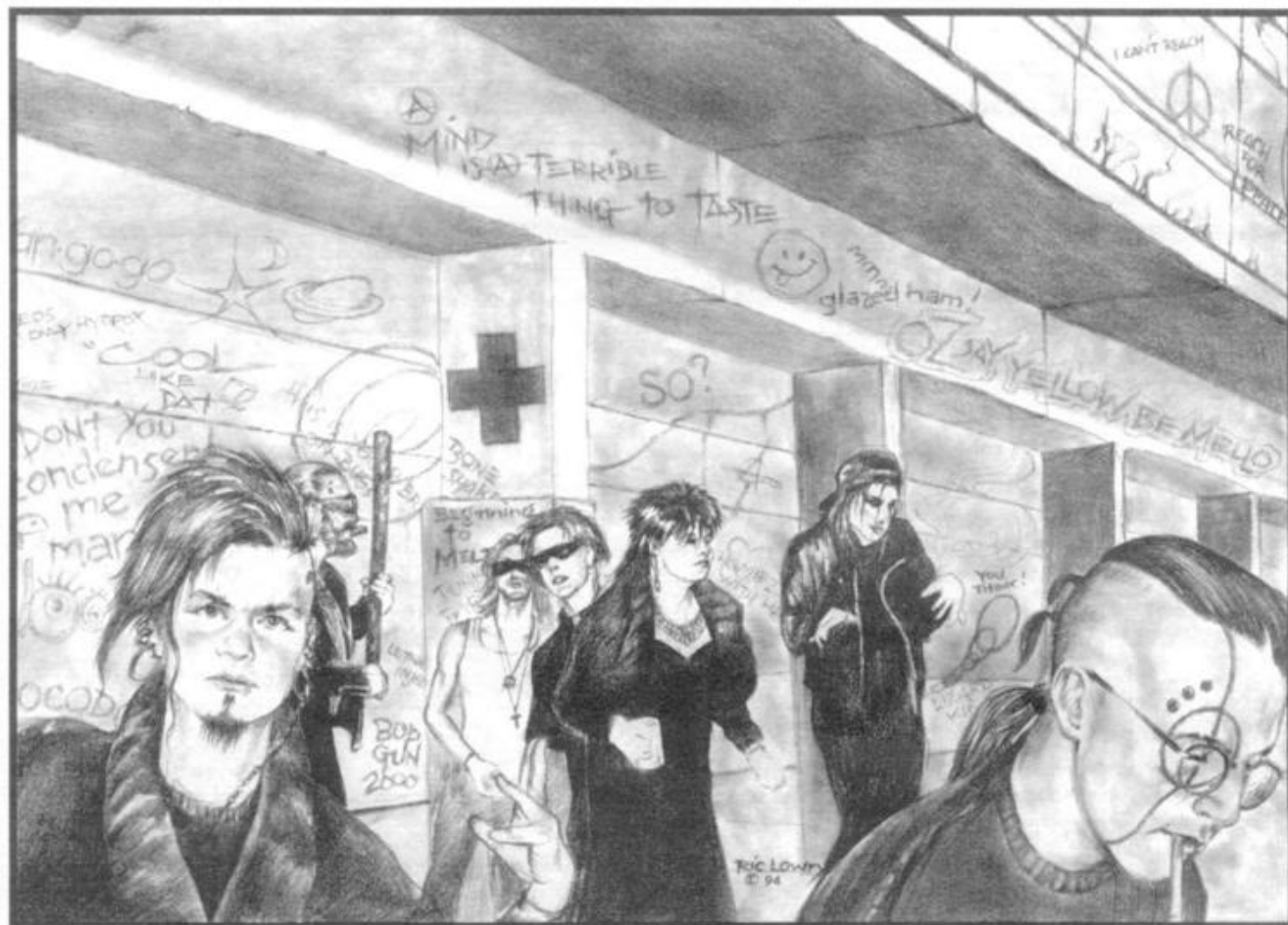
CRAIG SHEELEY— GETTING CHARACTERS TOGETHER

One of the greatest problems with starting up any role-playing game is that of getting the characters together as a cohesive group. This problem has given birth to the classic (and timeworn) joke, "you all meet in a bar..."

There are several ways to introduce the player-characters to one another. One of the simplest and most direct is

already outlined in *Cyberpunk 2020*, that of having all the PCs be part of a single team. This not only introduces them to each other, but it gives them a common goal and encourages them to think of each other as teammates instead of acquaintances.

The chance meeting in the bar is hackneyed, but servicable. The trick is to engage player-character interest by giving them a reason to bond together—say, by having them gathered together to act as a temporary team (all contacted by the same Fixer, the one that all of them picked up from the Lifepath generation. See the next paragraph for more on this bit of blatant

manipulation), or by threatening them and forcing them to fight together or die separately.

Come to think of it, one of the more interesting ways to bring player-characters together is to connect them through a threat or present danger. Here's a sample scenario: All of the player-characters happen to eat out at the same vendor. Unbeknownst to them, the vendor's food has been doped with an experimental mind-altering drug that heightens both their aggressive and pack instincts, as well as adding a specific scent to their perspiration that only they will recognize. This scent marks them as part of the same "pack," and they naturally cluster

together, acting like a surly wolf-pack. The drug, provided covertly by a sneaky corp secretly testing its effectiveness, is designed to turn entire neighborhoods into involuntary combat gangs, ready to trash anyone perceived as being a threat to the "pack," trespassing on "pack" turf, or even being different. The uses for this would range from causing civil disorder to creating combative hordes who would be willing to follow suggestions and orders from an operative treated with the appropriate scent. (For those who are wondering, I've just described a variant of the Block Mania toxin from the *Judge Dredd* comic.)

Or the drug could be a slow-acting poison or bioplague, and the PCs have a limited time to get the antidote and save their lives. Or the player-characters might be harrassed or threatened directly by an external group, a gang, corp, or so on. Nothing brings humanity together in a common cause like an active "us versus them" threat. (Ha! Imagine opening your campaign with the PCs in an elevator, the same elevator that the Bozos are planning to dump a barrel of hungry rats into. That'll get the characters acquainted quick! And angry as heck at the Bozos, too.)

A less convoluted and Machiavellian method of introducing player-characters to one another is to have them be pre-introduced as friends or mutual acquaintances. The adventure in the *Cyberpunk* GM's Screen assumes that all the PCs are roomies, and have been rooming together for some time. Mutual friends are a good way to bring PCs together; these friends can be easily provided by the Lifepath process (see below).

THE LIFEPATH AS A TOOL

The Lifepath is more than just a past for the characters. It does more than flesh out the character's life and times. It provides the referee with a great many oppotunties for roleplay and character problems to come. Think about it; every friend, lucky break, calamity, love affair, and especially every enemy provides the referee with just that many more things that he can throw at the beleaguered player.

How are these things used? Well, besides the obvious applications—like the fact that those past enemies are going to show up sometime; bank on it(!)—Lifepath events are good ways to tie the characters together. Say one character has a friend, an ex-partner or someone the character worked with. The character is a solo; let's say that the friend is a weaponsmith. And another character, a techie, has a friend who's got similar interests. What a coincidence; the solo's weaponsmith and the techie's fellow traveler are the same person. Or perhaps characters share a common enemy, or even love interest! (Guaranteed to cause lots of fun friction within the group; not for the squeamish referee.)

Sometimes the referee has to step in and dictate a Lifepath event, deliberately linking characters together. I find that it's easiest for the referee to have the player roll the D10 for Lifepath events, and tell the player what happened to the character. That way you can make the Lifepath event anything you want, heh heh.

GOAL-ORIENTATION

When you start a campaign, some thinking has to be put into campaign development before you even start it up. Ask yourself the following questions: What do you want the characters to develop into? Do you have a specific goal in mind, some sort of change in history or the surroundings? For instance, do you want to have the campaign developing up to the catastrophic incident which triggers the alternative future of *CyberGeneration*? Or do you want an orbital war to break out, signalling a corporate war in space and on the ground? What about a corporate takeover of the USA? (Part of the background of *CyberGeneration*; even if you don't agree with some points of the supplement, you can adapt pieces of it to your own use.) You really should determine the thrust of your campaign early, so you can plan accordingly.

After you've decided the general direction of your campaign's development, you have to work with the players. What do the players want their characters to become? Discuss this with each of them privately; find out what their ambi-

tions are, where they want their characters to go, what they want them to do. Don't underestimate your players; they'll often have ideas that can be put to good use within your campaign, and they'll provide you with plot twists that you'd never have thought of yourself. Of course, you don't have to give them exactly what they asked for; mix and match, mutate their ideas, and turn them into your own plotline.

The step of consulting your players is vital to the ease of maneuvering them into following your plotline. They'll be eager to get involved in something that they suggested, and will probably be pleasantly surprised when they discover the twists you've added to their suggestions.

It's amazing how many referees don't take the time to even plot out the direction of their campaign, much less consult their players for actual assistance (I, too, have been guilty of this. Often.). Not only does it give a good direction to the campaign, assisting the logical progression of events, but it makes things a lot easier when the players can actually see light at the end of the tunnel. Of course, the campaign doesn't have to stop there; it can continue, mutated into another campaign! Think of it as sequels to a book or movie...

BENJAMIN WRIGHT—

The kid gloves are off, gato— *Cyberpunk* isn't supposed to be easy. For referees, the Dark Future is a severe challenge! In 2020 death lurks around every corner, hope is in small supply, and ambition is the only virtue. Such an environment is certainly ideal for fast-paced, stylish adventures; any edgerunner will tell you that greed, violence, paranoia and attitude are perfect accessories to the perfect crime. But such an environment is discouraging to long-running campaigns. The atmosphere on the Edge is pretty oppressive and can become eventually daunting and ultimately unsatisfying. Another obstacle to long-term campaigns is *Cyberpunk's* lack of a clearly-defined "villain." This can

The Seven Steps to a Successful Saga:
1: **Think Hard**
2: **Make A Decision**
3: **Choose Characters**
4: **Find Players**
5: **Lay The Foundation**
6: **Get Writing**
7 **Maintenance, Maintenance, Maintenance...**

be a real problem—without a Bad Guy, what do the Heroes do on Friday night? The modern world cannot really function without the omnipresent corporations; in truth, the 21st century's biggest enemy is entropy, not evil. This situation is not terribly inviting to those referees who need predefined goals to build a long-running campaign around. Well, you know what we say to those referees?

Tough!

This is the kind of situation you, a *Cyberpunk* referee, were born for! You have total freedom in 2020—you supply the motivation, the action, the whole situation by creating a good story.

Yes, a story. This is what being a referee is really all about. Running a long-term roleplaying campaign is only one step removed from writing a novel or scripting a movie. If you really want to create a long-term *Cyberpunk* campaign (heretofore to be referred to as a Saga), you must start by thinking about what you want to happen; not about who the PCs will fight or how much money they can make, but what they will be doing. Then, find some people who want to play *Cyberpunk*. That's the next step—establishing a campaign premise is the first and most important step. Natch, more steps follow. They are listed in the sidebar—follow them, and your Saga will be a success.

A Warning: Murphy's Law applies to running Sagas too. The recipe assumes ideal conditions, so it may not always be possible to follow all the steps exactly, or in their original order. There are numerous complications to consider. You may not have enough time to be fully prepared; your players might insist on using their favorite characters (a horror); you might not be able to find players at all! These are all individual problems which must be dealt with on an individual basis, so they will not be covered in any detail here. Just be resourceful.

Individual complications notwithstanding, the key to a successful Saga is preparation; if you are truly well-prepared, your players will know it. This improves everything—your players will feel flattered that they are worth the amount of work as you put in, and you will feel safe and comfortable since you will be firmly in control of the game.

But enough jockeying. Let's take those seven steps.

STEP 1: THINK HARD

This is the most basic level—usually, you'll have gotten to this step by the time you've even decided you want to referee a Saga. Well, what kind of Saga do you want to run? The answer to this question is all about style—scale, setting, morality, violence and technology are all elements of a campaign's style, and are well-covered in Chapter 8 of this book. The point about Step 1 is to mull over all the elements of a *Cyberpunk* Saga's style and see what piques your interest. This is the fun, easy part (the hard part is Step 2). Consider what it is about 2020 that bothers or interests you, and use these elements to form a general idea of the style your Saga will have.

For example, let's say that what bothers us is that all the corporations in 2020 seem to be malevolent, greedy establishments which are a necessary evil. We decide that the theme of the campaign will be an attempt to "humanize" one of the corporations; scale will have to be relatively large to effect such a change (a national level at least). The setting will involve travel in order to reach all the parts of the corporation (pan-national if not pan-global), but will be based in the city which is home to the company's headquarters. With such a lofty goal, morality will be higher than average for *Cyberpunk* (but not too high—eggs and omelettes, y'know) while violence will be low-scale, since changing a whole corporation takes more brains than brawn. To make the theme hit home, the company will be technology-oriented (tres cyberpunk) and thus the game's tech level will be a little above-average. With these concepts in mind, we're ready to get specific...

STEP 2: MAKE A DECISION

Time for the embryonic Saga to grow up. Pick specifics, set plot points, and think about major NPCs that will combine to form your grand scheme. A goal, a basic plot, and

an outcome must be chosen and defined right now. As the "writer" of your "story," it is time to start editing yourself—making choices can be a pain because you limit yourself, but it has to be done. What will you allow and what will not be seen in your Saga? What will the characters really be doing, and what will not be their business? When making such decisions you set the power level of your player-characters, the agency they will have in determining the course of the adventures, and most importantly the potential depth of the roleplaying that will occur.

Your decisions should be influenced by your own interests and capabilities as a Referee; don't run an insider trading campaign if you can't tell a stock from a bond (unless you want to do some heavy research, which is certainly acceptable—who says roleplaying can't teach you anything?). Similarly, if you don't like the more cerebral, low-combat/high-drama arena of gaming, don't feel you're obligated simply to impress your players. The point is to have fun, not to put forward the image of a "refined" gamer. If you really want to, there's nothing wrong with speaking softly and carrying a big gun! However, it really is a shame to squander *Cyberpunk's* strengths on hack-n-slash when there are so many games out there which were made for it. Similarly, if you want your Saga to be a romantic tragedy, don't feel obliged to throw in pointless combats just to excite your players—it's quite possible (and infinitely more original) to excite them with drama instead of violence. Many roleplayers enjoy a healthy mix of the two, however, for the greatest range. As the referee, choose what you want; if you do it well, the players will enjoy it too.

Continuing the example from Step 1, the Saga will follow a secret cartel as they attempt to take control of the cybernetics corporation Raven Microcyb. This take-over will not be a traditional corporate takeover, but rather a secret redistribution of power through varied channels. The cartel (the PCs) will be made up of a small group of friends/associates who each have great influence in their own field. Together, they will bring the power of the street, the corporations and the individual psyche into play—a wide variety

of environments, situations and characters will be explored by the Saga. The emphasis will be on intelligence, good planning and intense roleplaying, but there will be room for combat as well. The Saga will begin with the formation of the cartel, and follow it through a gradual infiltration and symbiosis with the corporation. In the end, the cartel will either succeed in turning Raven Microcyb into the corporate bastion of the *Cyberpunk* revolution, or be destroyed by the corporate society itself.

STEP 3: CHOOSE CHARACTERS

Before organizing the player group, the Saga's characters must be conceived. This does not only include NPCs, but PCs as well. This is probably the single most important factor in running a successful long-term campaign; determine the necessary roles/characters first. Yes, first! This does not mean that the players must use pregenerated characters, but the referee needs to decide what types of characters will be needed for the Saga.

Most *Cyberpunk* campaigns are built around the players' characters. This is a recipe for disaster. When a referee decides that he will run a long-term campaign, he cannot take each player's favorite character and expect to form them into a cohesive group. If each player has made their own character without the referee's involvement, then the character will have no connection to the Saga or the other characters—under such circumstances, the referee will be facing a crap shoot. The roles, backgrounds, personalities, socioeconomic positions and capabilities of all his Saga's characters will be out of his control and it will therefore be near-impossible to create a coherent Saga.

To avoid such a farce, the referee must have an idea of what kinds of characters he needs in his Saga. Then he can work with the players in the creation of useful characters. This is the second most important factor in the creation of a successful Saga: the referee should work with each player in the creation of their characters. That way, the referee can weave together lifepaths, form alliances and common goals, and generally ratio-

nalize the team's existence. How many times have you, as a *Cyberpunk* player or referee, asked yourself "Why are these people working together at all?" If the referee is involved in the creation of the characters, this question need not be asked—it will be self-evident.

The reason for the existence of the team (or group, or posse, or crew or whatever) should be built into the character creation process. For example, in running an Arizona Nomad family Saga, the referee should make sure that all the characters are members of the same Nomad family. The PCs need not all be related, but they could be—they may be patrol partners, lovers, competitors or anything else. In such a Saga, the referee may want to allow dual-Role characters, so that each PC could be a Nomad/Other Role, such as Fixer, Techie, Netrunner, etc. All the characters would probably be relatively low-powered; Nomads are a pretty humble breed of character as opposed to Corporates.

In the case of the sample Saga from Steps 1 and 2, the situation would be totally different. The characters would have to be respectably powerful and be from different backgrounds. Each should have goals which would be served by the control of Raven Microcyb, and they should have reasons for working together. The referee may decide that he needs a Netrunner who works for Raven Microcyb, a Fixer who handles corporate-street negotiations, a Corporate from one of Raven Microcyb's competitors, and a freelance Media who specializes in working undercover (perhaps this character could even be a Spy). The referee would then sit down with his players and the character positions would be doled out—then each player would work with the referee to bring their character to life. The motivations and backgrounds of the characters are worked out, tweaked by the referee, and the Saga's chances of success are magnified tenfold.

STEP 4: FIND PLAYERS

Finding players can be terribly difficult, and there is very little that this book can do to help you. Do your best to find people you like, who are

good roleplayers and are available on a semi-regular basis. This can, in itself, be a monumental task. However, once you have found your players there may still be problems. Some players will not like the idea of having to choose a character which suits your Saga; some people aren't happy unless they're playing Solos. There are two choices here: look for other players or work out your differences. The best idea is to try and make sure that your Saga idea will also be agreeable to your players. If your players like big guns and explosions, then an all-Netrunner campaign may not be for them (technically, they should be playing some other game entirely, but oh well). If possible, the referee is advised to sit down with the players and discuss what kind of Saga everyone would like to play before any work is done—that way, the players and referee will all be satisfied.

STEP 5: LAY THE FOUNDATION

Preparation is the third key to a good Saga. Some referees prefer to work off the tops of their heads, with only a couple of pages of notes and few (if any) pregenerated characters. Other referees write dozens of pages of background, create new sets of rules and populate their Sagas with crowds of detailed NPCs. Both methods are equally valid, and each has their plusses and minuses, but it is vital that the referee is prepared. If the PCs are going to encounter certain people, places or situations frequently then those things should be detailed before the campaign starts—this will bolster continuity and make the world which the PCs experience seem more "real." The players will also feel more comfortable if they know that their referee is prepared and has specific values assigned to the familiar elements of the Saga. If it is obvious that everything they encounter is vague, ill-defined and generally "made up," the players will be unable to really relate.

In the case of the Raven Microcyb Saga mentioned in previous steps, several elements should be nailed down

before any particular adventures are planned: a Corporate Profile (like those in *All Things Dark and Cyberpunk*, in the 2020 rulebook) should definitely be created for Raven Microcybernetics. It might be advisable to create a sort of mini-Corpbook for Raven, but some referees do not want to go to such troubles. Raven's Data Fortress would definitely need to be well-mapped. The Media's cover identity, his contacts in the broadcast news industry and his access to support would have to be defined. The Fixer's network of contacts and facemen would have to be created and his capabilities would need to be well-understood. The major NPCs within Raven Microcyb and other characters either supporting or opposing the takeover attempt would need to be generated. Romantic situations and those concerned would have to be established, and finally such sundry details as a 2020 calendar and grasp of the various locations would be needed.

With all these elements clearly defined, the referee will not need to make them us as s/he goes along. Important plot points will revolve around these pre-established details, and new adventure hooks will already be planted in the nooks and crannies of this material.

STEP 6: GET WRITING

Storytime. The adventures that the PCs will go through on the way to achieving their goals must be created by the referee. There should be room for sidestories like romances and lifepath-related events, and each character should get a roughly equal amount of attention and exercise a roughly equal amount of overall influence. It is recommended that each character have their own sidestory during the course of the Saga—if these all occur at the same time things can get complicated, so it is recommended that each character have their own sidestory during a different chapter of the Saga. This way, each character can play the "hero," and every player gets the satisfaction of contributing to the campaign as well as enjoying character development.

STEP 7: MAINTENANCE, MAINTENANCE, MAINTENANCE...

Despite all best efforts, every referee comes to realize that there is no such thing as absolute control of a campaign. Corrections, rewriting and diplomatic crises constantly plague Referees. Taking care of problems with the Saga is an issue of maintenance. As an ongoing process, the referee must constantly update, modify and otherwise tweak the Saga to keep things in order. The big maintenance problems are concerned with the players' actions, character balance, individual player participation and "long-lasting freshness."

Ah, players...Aaargh, players! No matter how hard one tries, a roleplaying game cannot be scripted (the fact is, it shouldn't be scripted). Players are always doing things that their referee never expected—or never even thought of! This is why referees need strong imaginations and an ability to improvise. Players sometimes act much smarter than the referee expected, finding a simple way around a supposedly difficult problem; sometimes players do things dumber than their referee could ever anticipate, spending several sessions trying to figure out a painfully obvious clue. The referee should try to accommodate such events without punishing the PCs. This is very important. If the players outsmart you, don't punish them for it—just go with it and learn from your mistake. Similarly, if the PCs are being extra-slow, don't force them in the right direction, just give them a nudge. Just keep cool and be rational.

Players can also throw a monkey wrench in the works if they feel they are being neglected. Sometimes, a character feels that s/he has no particular role in the campaign or cannot exercise any power. Play balance is vital to a successful Saga, since dissatisfied PCs will sometimes take problematic measures to vent their frustrations. Disgruntled PCs might try to "ruin the plans" of the referee, start fights with the other char-

acters or otherwise force the campaign to pay more attention to him. These actions may not even be conscious, but it does happen. To avoid such a nightmare, be sure to maximize individual player involvement—but be sure each PC gets equal attention and has equal importance (overall; naturally, some adventures will focus more on one character than another). As long as the referee knows who's playing, what they're there to do and gives them something to do each session, the PCs will feel satisfied with their roles. To make sure that each PC is also satisfied with their role-playing opportunities, make extensive use of lifepath events and characters. Run sidestories which feature continuing villains, complicated romances and develop personal nemeses. Heap on the drama! Don't be afraid to sound like a soap opera—it works.

As the Saga runs on, there lurks the danger that the referee and/or the players will become bored. Their adventures may start feeling alike, the same goal may become less interesting, or the team of characters may become too comfortable (or uncomfortable) together. Not a problem. There are innumerable ways to keep a Saga fresh—certain events can be roleplayed live, using props and costumes (thereby sprucing up the gaming forum). Time can be taken out from the central Saga to roleplay lifepath events or the actions of NPCs (thereby changing the focus and environment). Gimmicks such as lighting and music can be used to accent important characters or elements (thereby enhancing the atmosphere). Finally, different themes can be explored in different chapters of the Saga—desperation, romance, revenge, hopelessness and victory could each be explored in a separate chapter of the Saga. These themes would not need to be announced; the PCs would get a feel for them and get into the new style. The key to fresh gaming is always trying something different. Avoid routines and you avoid mediocrity.

Be prepared. That's the best any referee can hope to do. When the time comes, the right side of your brain will do the rest.

ERIC HEISSERER—

THIS IS NOT YOUR FATHER'S ROLEPLAYING SYSTEM (OR "A CHANGE IN OBJECTIVES")

Since the genesis of *Dungeons & Dragons*™, roleplaying campaigns have been forged around the concept of the Quest or the Dungeon Crawl. Many weekends would be spent delving into the depths of some underground maze where monsters lurked around every corner. Homemade maps were drawn as whole continents were invented. "Levels" were acquired for each character as the campaign continued, which uncannily made the character stronger, healthier, and much harder to kill. Suddenly, the thought of slaughtering some hideous beast was met with ambition and excitement, as a successful kill meant personal advancement. Experience was like a second currency.

In those days, it was easy to motivate your players. Maintaining a campaign was as simple as identifying a player's personal goals: "you're almost to fifth level," or "you know the magical +5 sword of mosquito-swatting is in this dungeon."

Since that time, many other roleplaying games and genres have emerged. You can play almost any type of character you wish. Every game offers you a new concept, a new system, or a new version of an old concept. But new concepts often require a new style of campaigning. On occasion, a campaign style will be evident through the genre that it covers; for example, a "super hero" roleplaying game is easy to run as a long-term campaign because the concept has already been successful in the comic book industry. However, the player or GM won't always have an obvious example of a successful campaign for a game, which forces him to develop one on his own.

Cyberpunk happens to be one of those games.

In order to establish and sustain a flexible, long-term campaign in *Cyberpunk*, it is wise to construct it around the concept of an ongoing television series, rather than a quest or dungeon crawl. The television series format is strong mainly because of its flexibility with goals and plotlines: if something doesn't work, discard it and focus on something else. So how do you design a long-term campaign that culminates the talents and interests of every PC in the party? It's not easy, but here are a few tips to help you along the way.

SET-UP

You want to make your first session an important event, because it is your 'pilot' of the series. First impressions are vital to a good campaign, and the referee sets the example. In other words, if you put a lot of effort into the game, so will your players. Have you ever played in a game where the referee just sat back and didn't get involved? A campaign almost always dissolves or escalates to chaos when the referee just hands the reins over to the PCs and waits. Some PCs view it as a "free-for-all" and find a target to be the focus of their violent tendencies. Others wander about, searching for a plot or storyline. Characters distance themselves further and further until finally every PC is on their own. Meanwhile, the referee sits back and says "I'm just a referee; you people have to drive the campaign."

Not so, Sherlock. There is a dramatic difference between "PC empowerment" and referee laziness. Don't ever try to give your players the impression that you don't have anything planned or that you won't actively participate in the game, because it will seem like you don't care about the campaign. Yes, you want your PCs to take charge and make their own decisions, but you also want to motivate them. Here are a few tips to start on the right foot.

BE PREPARED

Show your team that you've put a lot of effort into starting the campaign. In doing so, players will usually want to reciprocate to show their appreciation. First, work with your players during character generation. Get to know the type of character they want to play, not just the career they choose. Most players associate a definite personality with their characters to help them roleplay during sessions. Get a feel for this before you set to work on a detailed campaign concept. Also, make sure you get a copy of everyone's character sheet for record-keeping purposes. Pay attention to each character's lifepath, for it is one of the most reliable tools that a *Cyberpunk* referee can use. Generate names and backgrounds for relatives and friends of your PCs.

Once you've tackled the player characters, move on to NPCs and props. Props (physical objects players can hold) are great tools for a referee, because they say "I've taken the time to make this as real/fun as possible." They don't have to be ultra-realistic or look like they were professionally designed to be effective. Handwritten invitations and table tents with the names of the PCs on them are just as impressive as cyberware models or other elaborate props, so don't feel you have to have a budget to make an impression.

START OUT WITH A BIG BANG!

The first session is a key opportunity to encourage teamwork from the PCs. If you give the players an opportunity to veer from the main plotline or the rest of the party, chances are they will, especially if it's early in the game and they don't know the other PCs. You want everyone to work together for two reasons; 1) they must start to develop some sort of relationship (business or otherwise) with other party members to keep them in the action of the game, and 2) you don't want to get distracted by PCs going their own way and doing something different when the rest of the team is trying to fuel the storyline. So how do you introduce everyone?

Throw the party together in a dramatic way and force them to operate together in order to overcome their opponent. For instance, start the campaign with the PCs regaining consciousness in the back of a moving van, as each of them were picked at random for some malevolent abduction (Biotechnica experiments, NCPD murder suspect roundup, etc.). Try to veer from the "same bar at the same time" cliché, because that offers the players a chance

to say "no" to getting involved with the rest of the group. Give them good reason to get to know each other. If they all survive their first encounter together, they will have good reason to keep in touch, if nothing more than to track down the bastards that messed with their lives and make them pay!

INTRODUCE NPCS THAT WILL PLAY PROMINENT ROLES THROUGHOUT THE CAMPAIGN

Be sure to give each NPC a strong character with a distinguishing feature or behavior. This will allow for instant character recognition among the players and it will make it easier on you as a referee to "toggle" between NPCs during roleplay. You never want to put yourself in a position where a player asks "who is talking to me?" or "who just said that?" Let them recognize a voice, action, or mannerism with the important NPCs. Develop body language for your characters, because players will pick up on those differences just as easily as vocal changes, and it can say a lot more about a character. Also, it's hard to do an accent right. If you're not good at imitating foreign tongues, don't try—it can make your characters cliché and two-dimensional. A good NPC has depth. Eventually, the PCs will "feed" your characters by anticipating their behavior.

Example: Tiger's Fixer is a hyper, enthusiastic man named Big Pockets. He talks incredibly fast and makes money even faster. After the first few meetings with Pockets, Tiger realized he needed to "slow him down" in order to catch the details of a mission, so he started bringing muscle relaxants to briefings held in bars or restaurants. Tiger would buy him a drink and, when Pockets wasn't looking, would slip a pill into his glass. After a few swallows, Big Pockets would dramatically slow down, and Tiger would have a few minutes to get the information from him before he would collapse.

PAY CLOSE ATTENTION DURING THE GAME AND WATCH YOUR PLAYERS

Who is the idea generator in your group? Who is the rebel? Who is the sheep that just goes with the flow of the game? And who is the comedian? Take note of the different behaviors and be prepared to adjust your campaign around the proper people. If you had originally intended to center the series around a Corporate character in need of "contract labor" on a regular basis, but the player running the Corporate doesn't make any moves to gather and lead the party, find someone who can. A good campaign needs a leader, even if he isn't the most "powerful" character in the party.

For example, a player could play a rich Fixer with lots of contacts and an oversized Streetdeal, but operate through a Solo player character who takes the job leads and does all the hiring. The two work as a functional team, as one is a conduit for the other. Some players like to stay in the background, others like to be in the limelight. Also, take a good look at attendance, and see who is committed to your campaign. Who is late? Who is early? Who "forgets" on a regular basis? Make sure your PCs that make up the cornerstone of your campaign are also your regulars.

Part of a player's "drifting" may be due to disinterest. It could be disinterest in the group, the game, or your campaign. Most of it is out of your control, but if you see too many players losing interest, you have a problem.

MAINTAINING INTEREST

Referees can occasionally lose sight of the purpose of roleplaying: to have fun. That doesn't mean "the referee has fun watching the players embarrass themselves" or "the players do whatever they want." It does mean that everyone enjoys each other's company and the focus of the game, whatever the focus

may be—humor, combat, fear, mystery, etc. Here are a few methods you can use to heighten the overall enjoyment of the campaign.

SHOW THEM WHAT IT MEANS TO BE "TALENTED"

A number of players will not be satisfied with their characters unless their special abilities are at an 8 or higher. Unlike other games in which the rules force PCs to start as amatuers, *Cyberpunk* puts the control in the referee's court. If you want the party to start the campaign with low or average special abilities, that's fine and well, but if you do not strictly enforce a limit for starting characters, your players will most likely go as high as they can. One reason is that they want to be good at what they do. Another is that they want money, and their special ability determines their monthly income.

Therefore, if you have a party with high special abilities (8-10), treat them as the professionals they claim to be.

Example: Spindler is a Fixer with a Streetdeal of 9. He meets with at least 10 or 12 different "customers" in one day interested in a variety of things: drugs, black market chipware, prostitutes, guns, employment, etc. Spindler soon realizes that he's a big fish in his pond, and he needs to start working that way.

Suggest to the player that he purchase a day planner for his Fixer, as he will be getting a steady amount of work, all with different due dates and dollar amounts. Have him track his money accounts and record his transactions. Players usually get excited about such involvement with their characters. The ones that don't particularly enjoy it will either lose business or see it as a "necessary evil" that comes with the territory.

This type of bookkeeping can keep you on track as well, as you'll be supplying your PCs with all the information. Documentation strengthens a campaign, especially if it's done by the players.

DESIGN A STANDARD FORMAT FOR YOUR REGULAR GAMING SESSIONS

Get your players accustomed to a routine or daily schedule. This strengthens a campaign because people will naturally become accustomed to (and even rely on) a framework for each game. Where there is strength in numbers, there is also strength in redundancy. (Did I already say that?) Start and end your sessions with the same activity or event, and be sure that it gets all PCs involved. Here are some examples:

LATE-NITE BODY LOTTO.: Formulate a detailed presentation of the Body Lotto and have it air on Network 54 at the end of each session. Make sure that each lotto is similar by giving the same disclaimer during each presentation. "The numbers of the Body Lotto are taken from six random districts within the Night City Greater Metropolitan Area. Numbers are derived from the locations that cadavers are found, not necessarily from where they were murdered. All numbers are accumulated by the Nighty City Police Department and verified by the investment firm of Merrill, Asukaga, & Finch. And tonight's numbers are..." Something like that. Soon, your PCs will start mouthing the words to the disclaimer and waiting for the numbers to be announced, as they'll be anxious to see if their ticket is a winner. Design your own system to determine the numbers for the body lotto and improve on it as the campaign continues.

THE BREAKFAST CLUB: Arrange a daily morning meeting to act as an "updating session" among PCs. A café or diner is a good location for these meetings, because it symbolizes "morning." Create and photocopy a menu of the diner and let PCs form food habits or dining traits. Opportunities like this help to solidify an identity for a character, as other PCs have a tendency to anticipate his or her habits. "Frank is late this morning, but we know what he'll get, so let's order it. Coffee with cream, no sugar..." You get the idea. These meetings or scenes also provide excellent roleplaying opportunities, which is a wonderful thing for a long-term campaign.

REWARD AND RESPECT YOUR PCs

Allow them to watch their characters mature, find and lose friends, get wealthier, and learn new skills. Improvement point delegation can be one of the most difficult challenges for a referee. There are a lot of varying factors that could alter the amount of IP to be rewarded to partymembers, and without a structured format or checklist to track IP rewards during a session, it is rough to be consistently fair. Here are some ideas for items on an IP checklist:

- Did the team reach their objective / accomplish their mission?
- Did anyone do something they've never done before? Did they succeed?
- Did anyone experience a personal tragedy or trauma?
- Did someone save the life of another (PC or NPC)?
- Did anyone say something incredibly (witty, funny, in-character, dramatic)?
- Were PCs doing things just to get IP? (If yes, explain why they don't get any.)
- Did anyone survive something next to impossible?
- Did anyone spend LUCK points?

It's a good idea to get a basic framework of IP rewards for two reasons: 1) you can fill it out during the session rather than relying on your memory and handing out last-minute IP amounts, and 2) you can use it to justify those IP rewards for players who feel that the rewards are unfair. Don't make a big deal about this with the players, because IP could become too much of an issue, but cover your butt, and get some thoughts or actions down in writing in case there are disputes.

Another area that increases over time is reputation. Reputation is different than IP in that a character can have a big reputation with little experience: he could be well-known as a major screwup, or as a hero. If you look at the reputation scale, you will see that after a certain point the media must play an integral part in a character's activities for his reputation to grow. You can be an incredibly

experienced professional with a very low reputation. If your profession is mostly illegal, a low rep is good. However, characters can have secret occupations and lives but live vicariously through an image or identity they create. This is known as an indirect reputation. (I know, I know, it's hard enough to keep up with just one rep score, but hear me out.) Here is an example of an indirect reputation:

Spectre is a professional thief who specializes in burglary. He wants to make sure that all his jobs are accredited to the same person, but he doesn't want people out looking for a guy named Spectre, so he leaves a blank business card with the words "The Chrome Ghost" at the site of each of his burglaries. Now he enjoys reading the screamsheets and watching the newscasts as they promote this "Chrome Ghost" to citywide popularity. He never tells a soul that Spectre and the Ghost are one in the same. Therefore, his direct reputation is 1 or 2, but his indirect reputation is a 7.

As a character improves, he changes. His goals change, his attitude change, and sometimes the player controlling him changes. And, like all *Cyberpunk* things, he is "subject to change without notice."

LIVING THROUGH CHANGE

Just when you thought it was safe to run another session, something happens. A key player moves out of town. A new supplement arrives, and everyone wants to play in it. Your players decide that they're tired of their "old" characters, and want to try out some new ones. Completely new ones. What do you do? You've developed all this material for your PCs, and you can't use it anymore. Do you start again? Let's hope not. Here are a few typical scenarios that halt or wound campaigns, along with some suggestions to keep things moving.

THE KEY PLAYER DROPS OUT

This could be temporary or permanent. Regardless, you need to meet with the individual and talk about the future of the campaign. If the play-

er is definitely going to return to the campaign and wants to play the same character, you need to set up a plotline or storyline that has the PC "disappear." The rest of the party could involve themselves in an investigation to find the missing PC, and you could make sure it drags on until that player returns. If the player is leaving permanently, then your options are usually limited to having the character leave or get murdered (the latter being a much more *Cyberpunk* alternative). These options are also popular if the player is returning but wants to play a minor role because he/she is tired of leading the campaign.

The most difficult transition when a key player leaves is finding another player to take his or her place. As mentioned before, a campaign needs a good leader. Occasionally another player will get envious of a leader's power and popularity, and when the leader leaves or moves away a transition will occur naturally. If this doesn't happen, you may need to find someone totally new to the gaming group to take charge of the campaign and keep it moving. Otherwise, sessions can become stagnant. The good thing about introducing a totally new player/PC to the environment is that it usually creates tension and conflict among characters in the campaign. Think about it: you were comfortable with your old boss. He paid you well, knew your talents and abilities, and kept you protected. Then one day—"bang!"—he's shot in the head and some new chromer takes the throne. You either risk the same fate as your old boss or you work with the new guy. Not much of a choice, really. But nobody said you'd have to like it.

A NEW SUPPLEMENT ARRIVES AND EVERYONE WANTS TO TRY IT

Warning: this may be a trend that passes after players experiment with the new supplement. In order to keep your well-developed campaign safe from these trends, test the supplement or system variant with the group in a one-shot adventure. Generate the characters for these games yourself, and hand them out to players at the beginning of the session.

You don't want your players to get too emotionally attached to their characters, which can happen if they create them. If a supplement is not too difficult to work into the campaign (i.e. a new *Chrome Book* or *Corporate Book*), then feel free to merge it with your current plotlines. However, if it is a dramatic shift in reality/time/atmosphere/location (i.e. *Deep Space* or *Cyber-Generation*), give everyone a taste of it in an unrelated adventure. If they feel satiated, then you can safely return to your normally-scheduled program without any plot interference.

A NUMBER OF PLAYERS WANT NEW CHARACTERS

Just as with the key player dropout, it is necessary to meet with your players and talk with them about their choice of new characters and why they no longer enjoy their old ones. This meeting will help you understand where their interests lie and it will also make the players aware that their old characters are important pieces to the campaign. This, incidently, raises player morale. Sometimes all it takes is a referee to ask a player "why do you want to bring this person out of the story when he/she is so unique?" for that player to change his or her mind. If not, make the player aware that by introducing a new character, the fate of the old one lies in your maniacal hands. Killing off PCs is the most effective way to induce drama into a long-term campaign. Just don't make it a habit.

Hopefully, these suggestions will help your campaigns run more smoothly. If you follow these guidelines but you still have many problems with the campaign, don't hit yourself over the head about it—it may be a player problem (see the Power Players chapter in this book for more information). You also may have discovered a completely different or unique set of guidelines for your campaign that works for your group. If so, stick with it. Just keep in mind that player and referee commitment is the drive of any long-term campaign, and you need something to keep that commitment alive.

ROSS "SPYKE" WINN—

BUILDING & RUNNING A CAMPAIGN

It is simple enough to think that the Campaign is a story. However, writing that story is a lot more difficult than it sounds. Writing a story is not easy, and neither is building a successful campaign. First you must have a theme and basic plot or story outline; then characters, subplots, interludes and the master plot. It could be a story of revolution, a romance, psychological horror, it does not matter. All campaigns are built the same way.

In *Cyberpunk* a campaign is usually a series of six to twelve adventures. These adventures are linked by a common theme, and tell a story. Openended campaigns are possible, but the regularity of changing players, multiple goals, and differing campaign possibilities makes this cumbersome.

Remember: A continuing campaign is a joint decision, both the players and the Referee must agree to continue.

In most roleplaying games the idea of a campaign is a play-world where adventures can go on endlessly. In *Cyberpunk* the ideas are a little different. The economic pressures and entropy of modern society will force the end of the *Cyberpunk* revolution in twenty to thirty years. If the Ref chooses to include the Cybergeneration in their "world" then the Cyberpunk Revolution will end in 2027. The Cybergeneration will probably last between 20 and 30 years.

In all the recorded history of man revolution has been limited to this time. Why? Because the new generation tends to accept "how it is" as normal. As the older generation dies out, this appearance of normalcy is reinforced. As an example: ask most people over 40 to play a Nintendo™ game, or program a VCR!

IT'S A FINITE THING

As much as many of us may wish to think otherwise, a 2020 Campaign is a finite thing. Like a movie or a novel it must end. Larger stories may be told in a "series," but without these endings, little victories, and resolutions we wander—aimlessly.

Do not confuse finite with short. If the Referee and the players decide they want a long campaign (more than twenty adventures) then go ahead. Finite things have a definite beginning and end, but the middle can be as long as necessary.

THEME

The themes of literature are the inspiration for *Cyberpunk* as a whole. Without the allegory and satire that Science-Fiction Literature allowed some authors, we would not be here writing this book. Whether it is man versus machine, man versus nature, crime does not pay, or love conquers all, the Campaign must have a theme.

It is not necessary for the Referee to explain completely to the players what the theme is. Unless the players are extremely sophisticated, and can discuss elements of the game before they are played. Even then, the Ref may be giving too much away by explaining the theme.

STYLE

How the game is affected, or rather to what level the game is affected, by its style is up to the consensus of players and Referee. The Chapter on *Cyberpunk* styles will talk about the what of style, but the Ref and players must decide the why and how of style.

FINDING PLAYERS

It is not as easy as it sounds. Different types of games require different types of players. As I have said you do not ask a thirteen year-old bully to play a smooth-talking sophisticated fixer, etcetera. There are other problems with building a play-group. If two play-

ers have an adversarial relationship (every group has two who never seem to get along) then you do not put them in opposing power roles; like a Fixer and a Netrunner. The two players will try to compete, and it will detract from the game. Making the players natural compliments (like a Streetpunk and a Nomad, or a Medtech and a Cop) avoids that problem.

THE BASIC COMPONENTS

A campaign-story is broken up into three major sections. The Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis. Between these sections, or really anywhere in the story, there are also sections called Interludes. Some campaigns may also have an Epilogue after the climax, or a Preface (Forward or Introduction may be better terms) before the start.
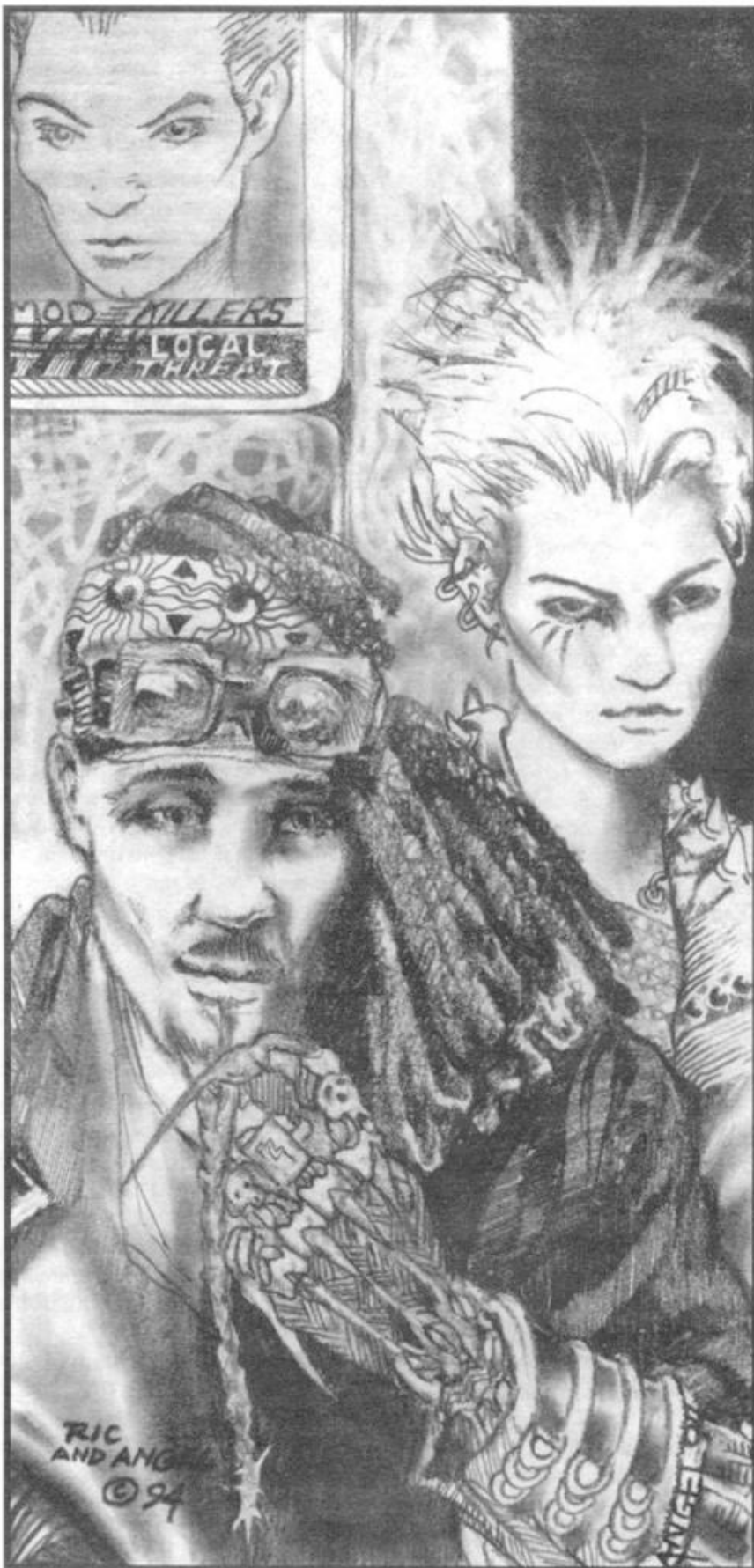
THESIS

The thesis describes for the players how the world works. Constants and information are introduced. This can be at times very boring for the players, so try to show them by example. The Ref should take extra time to info-dump and describe the procedure by which things are done.

Relationships are defined here as well. If a player has a debt, allegiance, or enemy they should make themselves known. After the players are all comfortable with their characters, then the Referee can start to challenge their world view.

In a Police campaign the first scenarios could revolve around "the neighborhood." Things like a roundup of suspects in a gang shooting; one of the characters being investigated because of a questionable shoot. Just walking the beat and solving the little everyday crimes.

ANTITHESIS

The antithesis is the problem, obstacle, or crisis that must be overcome. To continue the example: A renegade Borg killing a busload of school kids. The murder of a famous Rockerboy in his own home.

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AND ANG
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Corporations testing new combat drugs without consent. As the series of events becomes related, they realize that the world doesn't work by rules they see as "right."

SYNTHESIS

The Synthesis is the resolution. In the Police campaign, the synthesis could be a resolution of an immediate crisis; the destruction of a Corporation trying to control the city (by usurping the City Government, and taking over the Police), even though there is a "base-bottom" of larger societal ills. If the resolution was a culmination of a "saga" (linked campaigns) then the resolution should be something massive like a "New World Order."

CLIMAX

The Synthesis is usually ended in a climax scene. In a climax all the major elements come together from the campaign and (at least) figuratively "duke it out".

In the Police campaign example, the player confronts the CEO of this despicable Corp and (after he reveals the "master plan") the Team must decide his fate, and then get away.

Depending on the resolution of the final scene, an anticlimax or epilogue, could help the players understand some "loose ends" they may be wondering about. If the climax is very strong, having an epilogue could actually hurt the ending, so be careful. A Referee can always leave little mysteries. Some people call these "sequel endings."

INTERLUDES

Interludes provide needed breaks from the main thrust of the campaign. Players can get bored with the same old campaign, especially if it is more cerebral. The most important component of interlude is the ability to change focus, goals or even characters for a short time. This renews player interest, and relieves boredom.

There are sometimes huge pressures for the Referee to run a new supplement, or allow a piece of equipment. When *Maximum Metal* was debuted, everyone wanted to try on a suit of Powered-Armor. A skillful Ref can use this enthusiasm to recharge their players, and their campaign. It is also good to use interludes to shake up player hierarchy. Let a different player have the limelight for a change.

If the Team has uncovered the recording of an important extraction, then they could "see" it by roleplaying the event as an interlude. This won't really work for a team of solos (it would be just another fight), but if the Team is based around a group of fixers and Netrunners then this would be a good change.

PLAYER INTERLUDES

In many campaigns some characters will be more important, at least in terms of theme, than other players. The other players, even if they intellectually realize that one player has the "hero" role will begin to chafe under the burdens of being "less important." The reality of this situation is that all the players are important. This is not a platitude or sentiment!

Even if the game has an obvious Hero, all the players make the game. The whole is more than the sum of its parts. To alleviate these feelings the Referee can have interludes for each of the players.

A player interlude will "star" a player in a subplot. It could be something as simple as helping a long-lost friend, or saving the life of an old flame.

The Referee should realize that, to many players, the interlude will be as (or more) important than the greater campaign goals.

In the course of a campaign, all the players should have their turn in the spotlight. If two players' backgrounds mesh, or are related, you may choose to do interludes in a group of two. Something like ex-lovers trying to help an old friend. This is especially important if you have a large group.

THE SETTING: YOUR CITY

Of course, most campaigns will remain in a relatively small geographical location, or set of locations. If you think that designing a city is much record-keeping, try the country, or the world. If you want to keep the players in the locations you have so lovingly prepared, then they should be good. Lots of bars, cheap hotels, and a whole bunch of places to hide are always good bets. Each of these places will have regulars and staff, criminals and malcontents. There will be some neighborhood gangs, a few Boosters, policlubs, churches, posers, dorphers, and kids (yes, kids). This is only a scratch on the surface.

Most games are going to take place in urban areas; population density in the several thousands per square kilometer. It is not necessary to have an NPC sheet for each of these folks. A good rule of thumb is about one NPC for every ten-thousand per capita. For Night City Metro about 50 NPC's are necessary to start. There are a few shortcuts. Each of your players will probably have three or four NPC's that are a part of their lifepath, and half of those will probably be local. That is twelve (and you haven't done any work yet).

NPC CONTINUITY

It is important to keep records of the NPC's. As the game matures the Ref must keep track of who owes who favors (always a good source of adventure hooks), who pissed off who (and why), etcetera. Some of us are spoiled and have PowerBooks™, or portable computers of some kind. Others have to deal with three-ring binders and pens! For the "electronically challenged" I suggest spiral-bound 5x7" index cards. On one side you can mucilage a copy of the NPC record sheet (and maybe a small picture), on the other side you can make notes. I would also suggest writing in pencil, or using Post-it™ notes for short term info (like wounds). Don't be surprised if, by the sixth or seventh adventure,

you have well over one-hundred NPC's. These are the things that come back to haunt the team when they become famous.

WHAT DOES THE REFEREE WANT?

It is very important that the Referee know what aspect of the game their campaign is to address. If the Ref is not sure, then the players become confused. If the player does not want to deal in another "Solo For Hire" military campaign they have to plan what they do want.

CHARACTERS

Without characters the game is nothing but sheets of paper and dreams. Characters make the story real. Some campaigns have special character needs; others have requirements.

The Referee is the final arbiter of what roles, or concepts will be played in the campaign. Players should not be put off by this. If a Referee rejects a concept or role it should be because that concept clashes violently with the campaign, not because Pat doesn't want Chris to be a Solo.

A NOTE ON ROMANCE

It is important to note here that many players do not deal well with romance. The rampant use of stereotypes and archetypes in 2020 sometimes allows Refs and players to trivialize these important relationships. In *Never Fade Away*, Johnny Silverhand caused himself great personal pain and hardship to save his love. Not for personal power, or monetary gain, but for love. Romance is an important element of most literary and cinematic styles, so it cannot be ignored. If your players cannot handle Romance, they may be able to deal with Romantic elements.

Romantic elements are one step removed from romance. Instead of being involved in Romance, the players are helping to facilitate another romance. Romance is the player forcing himself in front of a bullet for their lover. Romantic is helping a pair of star-crossed lovers escape from the wrath of their parents.
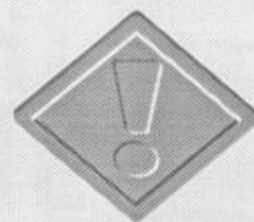
WHAT DO THE PLAYERS WANT?

The players' ideas about the campaign are as important as the Ref's. If the players are only interested in killing things, streetpunks and heavy metal; then a cinema verité-acid jazz-rocker campaign with heavy romance is not for them.

One of the most common criticisms of strong-story campaigns is that the players have no real input or control over their fate. This may be a gross oversimplification, but look closely before you discard it. Some Referees feel that their story, saga, or "song" of the campaign is all that is important. The player feels that they are most important; either what they want to do, or what they see as a goal. Both sides have to realize that the other is right.

The players must see that what the Referee wants to do is important. Anyone who puts as much time as is necessary into preparing a campaign must have a strong voice in what will occur in that campaign. At the same time the Referee must see that a campaign is more than a complicated way of saying "look here, see what I have created". This kind of tour-guide adventuring is for demonstration games.

CONTINUITY

It is important for the players and Referee to maintain continuity in a campaign. In most campaigns the players will be dealing in serial continuity. Each event that happens is in sequential order. If the Referee is running a flashback interlude and the players are actually making historical changes, then those changes should be realized in the game. The Referee has to remember, the players have the power to change (on whatever level) and that power is important. After all, *Cyberpunk* is a game about Revolution, and revolution is change.

THE CYBERPUNK MILIEU: STYLE & ATMOSPHERE

CRAIG SHEELEY—

TECHNOLOGY

Cyberpunk is a game centered around unfamiliar technology. The whole style and thrust of the game is the newtech; without it, there is no reason for the game, and the genre, to exist. Because of this, the new technology takes on an importance that it would never achieve in most other genres.
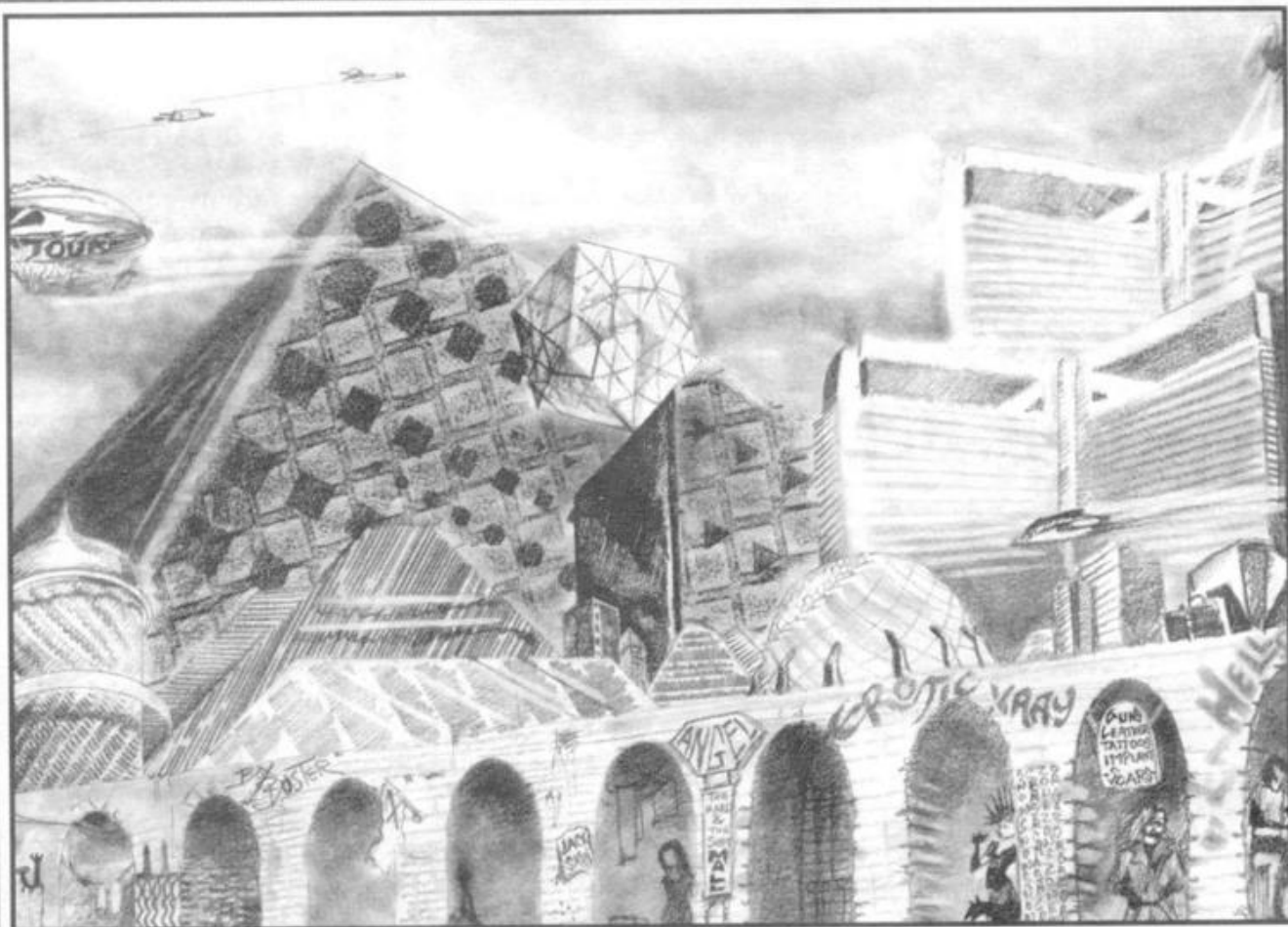
Miracle technology makes the world of Cyberpunk possible. Without the miracle of neural-to-electronic translation, the following everyday Cyberpunk items would be impossible: Neuralware (including smartguns), cyberlinked vehicles, the Net, cyberoptics and -audio and cyberlimbs. (Cyberaudio and cyberlimbs might be available as prosthetics, but not smooth-working improvements as are depicted in Cyberpunk.) That single discovery revolutionized physical augmentation and data transfer.

Another technological miracle is nanotech. Without nanomachines, most cybernetics would be difficult to install and get working. The act of reattaching severed nerves would still be done with super glue, as it is done today (no lie! I have the scars to prove it). Once the nerves are glued in place, the doctors hope that they'll grow together correctly. With nanosurgeons, the nerves can be directly sewn together like phone cables—to a nanosurgeon, a nerve is about the size a half-inch cable would be to a man—and nerve transmission can be assured. Think about the ramifications of trying to use a cyberlimb with imperfect nerve connections. And without nanonsurgeons, a simple neural processor implant would be the most grueling and dangerous surgery around; manually attaching computer leads to sectors of the brain!

The point is that newtech is often beyond the knowledge of the average Cyberpunk player, and often beyond the knowledge of Cyberpunk referees. This is convoluted, interconnected stuff, and Cyberpunk rulebooks and supplements

just don't have time to explain the ramifications and foundations of each piece of technology. An author for a competing game system spent about half of a large supplement explaining some of the finer points of the working of the human biosystem and how cybertech interfaced with and affected it. Unfortunately, this supplement had about one-third the amount of game material contained in a *Cyberpunk* supplement of the same size.

In this article, I'll attempt to outline some of the lesser-known facts, permutations, and ramifications of some of this *Cyberpunk 2020* newtech. Referees can use this information as they wish.

HEADWARE

The central miracle of neuralware is, of course, the discovery of a way to translate mental impulses into defined electronic data. This was no small miracle; the human brain doesn't think or work like a computer. Ask the same person to view the same picture three times in a row, and every time you'll get a different pattern of neurons firing in the brain! They're thinking about the same thing, but the thought is different every time! Living brains have on-off switches called neurons, and thoughts are composed of neurons generating electrical impulses in groups. That's where any similarity with electronic computers ends. Computers think in sequence—roughly put, counting 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Humans think holographically, different parts of their brains lighting up in neural activity and combining these thought-impulses into a single coherent thought—sort of counting 1, 3, 9, green, 42, who's there, 6. Like a computer, the human brain arrives at the answer (6), but goes all over the world to get there! (This method is even more pronounced in the female brain. Men tend to think with one side of their brain at a time, depending on the problem; women think with the whole brain at all times! Perhaps an explanation for feminine intuition?)

The practical outcome of neuralware is the ability to connect the human brain to electronic networks, producing the phenomenon of Netrunning, direct information feed, brain-controlled guns and vehicles, and even placing brains in fully robotic bodies. In the case of the latter two, they

were not possible without neural connections—without hooking a human balance system into a computer, it was not possible to program two-legged machines to walk. This made powered armor and other two-legged machines possible.

Netrunning is actually a fairly simple operation. The essential cyberdeck translates electronic data into symbols and then feeding the information to the netrunner as a sort of crude, interactive braindance (by braindance standards, the netrunning experience is crude. But netrunners aren't usually in the Net just for the thrill of a complete sensory experience…). The deck computer then translates simple mental commands into electronic commands and executes them.

Please note that netrunning does not put the runner's "soul" into the net! It only shows him a picture; it's the same thing as sitting at home, watching pictures and symbols on a computer screen, you just watch them in your mind. (No, vampire Netrunners from *Night's Edge* can't project psychic powers into the Net!)

Certain netrunning programs are harder to rationalize… Zombie would seem to do what it does by activating a neuro-chemical command to erase the 'file names' to human memory. This command does exist; Alzheimer's patients suffer from its effects. Liche is even more fantastic, activating the neuro-chemical that turns the human brain into an incredible information sponge (this phenomenon is present in human children during ages 2-4, when languages and information are retained at an unbelievable rate). Unfortunately for game play, the ramifications of this discovery would mean RNA-style learning, where you simply activate this chemical and have information fed directly to your brain. This information would be retained almost perfectly (any information skill available at skill level 5 or so from one session!). I don't allow these programs in my game; the rationalizations and ramifications are too far-reaching.

Direct information feed is best known in the form of APTR and MRAM chips. The way these work is fairly well-explained in *Cyberpunk 2020*, although it should be noted that the reason APTR chips require physical practice is to load the routines into the user's hypothalamus, the center of

repetitive and instinctual activity. MRAM chips work immediately, but without a Times Square Plus or a dermal screen, visuals contained within the chip are not available. Indeed, using an MRAM chip without one of the visual systems above is somewhat spooky; when you think about the subject at hand, information leaps into your mind, seemingly from nowhere. The next step in this information processing will be to access the occipital lobes and inject visual information directly into the field of vision, negating the need of cybereyes. At the moment, cyberdecks and braindance players do this—the trick is to downsize the requisite computer to fit in a human skull without crowding the brain.

NANOTECH

Ah, the wonders of nanotech. These tiny machines are the ticket to the next technological revolution (including the hard-to-believe Carbon Plague effects of *Cyber-Generation*). What are the benefits and drawbacks of various forms of nanotech?

How do you get it? Nothing simpler. You go down to the local registered Biotechnica clinic, have a complete physical, and give some blood. This is so the nanites can be specifically programmed for your biosystem! Nanites not specifically tailored for you and you alone, don't work right in your system. They might simply deactivate, or, in a worst-case scenario, start working, but work wrong. The consequences are horrifying.

Depending on how fast the nanite lab is, your treatment will be ready in one to ten days. At that time, you go in, lie down, and get a massive intravenous feed of nanites in a saline solution. After that, leave the driving to the nanites!

One universal foible of nanotech is that the machines wear out fairly swiftly. That first shot of nanomachines you get when you receive the treatment immediately builds nanofactories to build the specific machines inside you! This requires building material; the little guys scour your system for stones—a kidney or gallstone is a godsend, perfect building material, immediately dismantled. But the human body can't safely supply enough material to build the waves of machines (they're programmed to remove only inert materi-

al and not scavenge your bone structure and so on). So people with active nanite colonies (skinweave, nano-optic upgrade, and muscle/bone lace nanites are active for the appropriate manufacturing period only) have to take silicon supplements—big pills of powdered silicon—to maintain their little mechanical symbiots. Otherwise, they get cravings to consume silicon-rich substances. (Like sand … and concrete dust … and dirt!)

Skinweave, everybody's favorite true 'body' armor, makes your skin tougher. Literally. It also slightly deadens nerve impulses to the protected areas, as some tertiary nerves are cut off by the kevlar weave. Thicker skinweave makes your skin rubbery and scaly, causing irreplaceable loss of Attractiveness. And Skinweave doesn't protect the whole body; certain parts are exempt because of the need to have them remain flexible and retain full nerve sensitivity (the insides of the hands, including palms and the pads of the fingers, lips, genitalia). And don't change weight! The 'weave doesn't grow or shrink with you (unless you have further treatments).

Muscle and Bone Lace is the single most useful nano-miracle ever invented. The human body really isn't built for the rigors of living life while standing upright; lower back and spinal problems have been humanity's lot forever. MBL not only tacks the ends of your tendons down to the anchoring bone, it also sheathes the spinal column in a strengthening kevlar weave, five times as strong as steel. Goodbye slipped and cracked disks! In addition, it sheathes all your joints in reinforcing kevlar, rectifying the problems of arthritis, bone spurs, rheumatism, and other joint problems. Why, it can even cure carpal tunnel syndrome! How's that for a miracle?

Nanosurgeons, enhanced antibodies, and Lifesaver™ skinweave will have you sucking down silicon pills on a regular basis. And getting regular follow-up treatments, if you get hurt a lot.

Diet-Mite™ and Toxin Binders combine into a strange effect. Since the former extracts available nourishment from whatever you eat, and the latter nullifies poisons, you can eat anything carbon-based and mildly poisonous without discomfort! You will be taking silicon supplements continuously with either of these. (For more on Diet-Mite™, see the Rules Appendix, page 102.)

Medical nanites are the unseen workers of the incredible medical technology of Cyberpunk. They make neural connections possible, they scour diseased bodies to remove impurities and viruses, they remove bullets by dismantling them into small filaments which are then flushed through the urinary system, they patch damaged circulatory membranes and tubing, they remove fatty and other deposits from clogged arteries. And, most incredibly of all, cell-sized nanites can manufacture even smaller nanomachines to work on a body's DNA—to one of these nano-nanites, a DNA strand is about the size of a bicycle chain, and just as easy to work on! This miracle enables nanotechnology to cure cancer—when you dismantle the cancer at the genetic level, it doesn't come back—and change a body's DNA to spectacular effect. Fur-bearing, scaled and chitinous humans, i.e., exotics, are living examples of this tech.

BENJAMIN WRIGHT—

Style over substance. The looks or the lifestyle. To REALLY run a game of Cyberpunk, you've gotta get into it—that means embracing the genre in all its forms. There are a lot of terrific sources for the cyberpunk genre out there: the novels of William Gibson, Pat Cadigan and W. T. Quick, the music of Sigue Sigue Sputnik, Billy Idol and Information Society, the movies Blade Runner, Max Headroom and Until the End of the World. However, the ultimate in one-stop shopping is the hardcore cyberpunk sourcebook from the people at Mondo 2000 magazine, A User's Guide to the New Edge. It is written by people who are cyberpunk TODAY—they're as close as you can get to being a 2020 Edgerunner without drilling plugs in your head, packing a caseless handgun and owning a cybermodem.

Purism such as is exhibited by the Mondo 2000 crew is laudable, but can be limiting to a Cyberpunk referee. Those GMs who are over-fascinated with "true" cyberpunk will miss a lot; if you insist on your sources featuring cybernetics and flying cars you can scratch 1984 and Casablanca (two films which are literally bursting with cyberpunk potential).

But please—moderation in everything. Just about any work of fiction (be it a role-playing game, comic book, novel, TV show, movie or dirty joke) can be incorporated into a Cyberpunk framework with a little effort. This being true, one might wonder what really separates Cyberpunk from other modern or near-future adventure games. The answer:

Cyberpunk is a living fiction.

As a genre-oriented roleplaying game, what makes Cyberpunk stand out is not so much WHAT happens in an adventure as HOW it happens. Think about it: "Check it out, Scooter! Our team rescued the executive guy and ransomed him to the other company, then we got away in our helicopter! Yahoo!" "Crazy, Luke, but how cyberpunk was it?" There are a lot of roleplaying games out there about spies, mercenaries, ninjas, cops and private investigators, but their focus is on the action, not the environment.

As a living fiction, Cyberpunk is a framework within which action occurs; all activity in a Cyberpunk game will bear cyberpunk characteristics. There can be cyberpunk romance (Until the End of the World), cyberpunk detective stories (Blade Runner), cyberpunk cops n' robbers (Robocop) and even cyberpunk horror-meets-science-fiction (Alien). All actions must occur within a world, and Cyberpunk is a world.

It is particularly important to understand this principle (i.e., world over action) in terms of violence—many games exist just so the players can shoot big guns, drive tanks and throw great right hooks. In Cyberpunk, action (often combat) is how the plot is moved but it is not the purpose of the game. Cyberpunk Referees beware—don't let your campaigns degrade to such a level where the means become more important than the end. Violence is fine, as long as it moves your plot along—once combat stops being an obstacle and becomes an objective, your game is no longer Cyberpunk.

If a referee really intends to run a campaign with the unmistakable Cyberpunk style, it is vital to establish and maintaining the right atmosphere. Since Cyberpunk is about the world, and not

about a specific activity, a strong atmosphere is equally (if not more) important than a strong plot to a *Cyberpunk* adventure. This may sound superficial, but check it out: "Style over substance." Sound familiar? It's right there in the 2020 rulebook. There are roleplayers who can have a terrific game without any planned adventure—all they need is a referee and their characters, and they could go all night. True, this requires good roleplaying skills on the part of the players, a strong imagination on the part of the referee and a relatively strong background shared by the characters, but the fact is that the core of their enjoyment comes from the cyberpunk atmosphere, not from the adventure the referee sets them up for.

Don't get the wrong idea. Adventures matter. But that's obvious. The topic at hand is atmosphere, and it's not all that hard. Get into the genre and then be creative. There are several reliable gimmicks which will automatically put players in the cyberpunk state of mind—use these tricks, spice them up with some unconventional thinking, and you're in.

Always wear mirrorshades. Plain old dark glasses also work, but it's that "you're looking at me and seeing yourself" trick that really gets 'em. This may seem minor, but when the players can't see their GM's eyes, they can't read their referee too well—and since the GM's their link to the world they'll feel more edgy and alienated. And that's good.

Use stage effects. Y'know—lighting and props. Dark lighting is also key when setting the mood; in a brightly-lit room, the players will be comfortable and too distracted by other things around them (be careful to provide spotlighting so that mirrorshades won't obscure vision, though). Once it's dark, props will help to reinforce the players' experience. Put a TV in the corner and set it to a static channel. Provide actual documents which the PCs will use (some referees even print up their own screamsheets). Pull out a dummy knife with a spring-loaded blade (they can be found in party and costume stores) and "stab" a PC with it when their characters are jumped by Boosters. It works. One prop that is not very good is music—it's distracting, changes tunes at bad times, and can drown out conversation.

It's a dark, dark, dark, dark future. Nice things do happen in 2020, but by and large the PCs should see more bad than good. Then maybe they'll want to change it. Pitiful homeless people, junkies and victims are all over the place. Pointless crimes, the decay of great monuments and the corruption of that which is pure should constantly wear at the PCs' senses and minds. This does not mean lots of random violence (although that's a part), it means being grim.

Play at night. This goes hand in hand with a dark future. Sunshine and *Cyberpunk* don't mix. Even if the characters are in Bermuda, never play during the day unless the weather is cloudy, drizzly and generally miserable. Avoid playing *Cyberpunk* on nice days—it's distracting, and besides, don't you have better things to do?

Technology is everywhere. The PCs should always be encountering high-tech gimmicks and gizmos, even if there seems to be no reason for it. Heck, the tech doesn't even have to be functioning! Even Nomads in the desert will be festooned with datachip earrings, fiber-optic ropes tying their tents together and pocket TVs that only get one channel. Don't just use technology to impress the characters with fancy weapons. It's overused. Just don't let up—bombard them with technology.

Screw around with culture. Pop culture, mass media and sociopolitics—they're all collapsing into one big, seething chunk of confusion. The media is everywhere, screaming and yelling — videoboards, ad-blimps, dataterms, radio, screamsheets and the Net are all competing for attention. Brand names are plastered on everything from people's sneakers to their eyes ("Here, Jack, have some more I Can't Believe It's Not Fruit Juice!"). National boundaries are shrinking and cultures are mixing together. Thanks to the media-mass pressing in on it all, society is starting to look like a corporate-sponsored multicultural infommercial. Language-coded MRAM chips, anyone?

Don't go halfway when playing *Cyberpunk*. Use every gimmick available to make the players live a 2020 lifestyle. Push them to the Edge and see if they fall in...

CHARLIE WONG—

CYBERPUNK STYLE: FRIGHTENING YET BEAUTIFUL

We don't care what you use for source material for your *Cyberpunk* game. Go with whatever suits your tastes and fancy. Just know that whatever you choose, try to keep the look and feel of the genre. What do we mean by that? We'll tell you.

A thing to consider before starting is that cyberpunk media spans a very wide area. It encompasses many kinds of worlds, societies, technology and attitude. Even considering this, there are linking points that hold them all together in the same genre. Some of those links are explained below.

TECHNOLOGY

If you are looking to depart from the conventions in the *Cyberpunk 2020* rules, know that you can go nearly anywhere with this genre. *Neuromancer* has primitive space travel while *BladeRunner* has interstellar wars. From internal combustion to microfusion reactors, your *Cyberpunk* game can be set wherever and whenever you want—but don't let this freedom pull you away from the genre. What makes technology cyberpunk? First, there's usually a lot of it. These worlds are machine-dependant and gadget-oriented. Almost everything is computerizes or mechanized. In these worlds, there are usually a dozen versions of any item and everything is a style statement. Look is totally dependant on the consumer. It can look sleek or gaudy but it's all to attract the target consumer. There is so much competition everything has to try and stand out.

Second, cyberpunk worlds are not in technological stasis or decline. Far from it. They throw themselves headlong into the newer, faster, more efficient and more powerful. There should always be newtech seeping onto the street.

Newtech invented by the GM really spices things up because players won't be expecting it. While high tech items and how to get them can be the center of the game, they don't have to be. Tech also can serve to remind players that the world is not standing still. Rare items become commonplace and old ones are fazed out. Characters will constantly be immersed in pumping, seething technology. Make sure they know they're surrounded and outnumbered, even if it's just for looks.

CYBERWARE

Cybertech, like technology, can vary from fledgeling to all-encompassing. It might be amazing to have just interface plugs, or furnishing your body with cyberware could be like furnishing your house. The general idea when cybernetics are available is that they are useful tools. The lines between man and machine are blurred by the cyber in the punk. Get it? Humanity is not a point of concern. A character may be just as likely to get a cyberarm as braces for her teeth and silicone implants for her breasts. A common metaphor is about Man becoming ruthless Machines and losing emotion, compassion and the finer moral qualities that make people human. A very dramatic and angst-filled theme to play is a cyberpunk's alienation from people and their gradual slide into dark mechanical insanity.

PEOPLE

A common misconception is that everyone the characters meet is living the hard, cold, steely, lead-filled, cyber-enhanced world of a streetsmart punk. This is only true in a limited sense. The cyberpunk's way of life is part of a subculture. Only people in the right social circles will be true punks. Most people, even in the most violent areas of the world, just want to live their lives peacefully—they just duck bullets more often. Don't make players expect psychos around every corner unless that's an element of your game. Most people are usually pretty boring. Where cyberpsychosis is physical, this is a mental alienation from 'common people'. Cyberpunks want more, feel more, live

faster and die harder. This keeps them apart even when they just want to mix in.

STYLE

This is another topic that could be anything in your campaign. The old stand-by for dress is a lot of black, long coats and mirror shades. Cyberpunk stories are tales of the young and young at heart—people with the fire in their souls to seek high-adrenaline adventure an inch away from disaster. Youth and ambition are the main considerations of cyberpunk style. Being ambitious, they want to make a big splash in whatever they're doing. Being young, they'll want to look good doing it. This goes for the NPCs too. Looking good often has more weight than being good. Anybody with a drop of training can shoot a gun or program a computer. Look at the army or any college with a computer science department. What's hard is to look really cool and scary while shooting or programming—so cool that all the witnesses tell their friends and all the enemies run in terror. As a GM, keep in mind what the characters look like in the eyes of others. If they're scruffy bums with no personal grooming skills or good clothes, powerdealers will probably hold their noses at them. If someone wears a Tanaka suit to a gang party, he could get roughed up. NPCs will constantly be trying to get the upper hand on the PCs by talking tough and playing hard. Almost everyone has got a tough facade for their "audience." How convincing they are depends on the character's acting ability and their true personality.

Separate but related are what they see and where they are. The settings of cyberpunk stories are usually urban, with the protagonists as animals in the concrete jungle. If the story moves or is set away from urban areas, there tend to be a lot of people and open space—the people reinforce the crowded urban feeling even when there is no city. Open roads and rain forests are popular. Wherever the players are though, high tech and tough attitudes will be present or close by. Cyberpunks never escape the society that bred them.

The following are not linking elements in cyberpunk but are important to consider.

ATMOSPHERE

Along with a certain look, *Cyberpunk* worlds have a certain feel to them. They can be quiet and lonely, loud and fast, desperate and scary or whatever else the GM can dream up. There is generally something in the air that defines the game. This style may change as the players and their locations change, but the presence of one will persist to remind characters who and where they are. The street has a style of its own.

Setting is important because it defines the personality of your world the same way clothes and attitude define those of your NPCs. Is the daytime sky blue or rust colored? Do the players ever get to see the day? Is the light clean and sharp or smoky and diffused? Are the streets clean? Are people generally plain or a gaudy collection of sci-fi extras? Where are the local danger areas? Are those danger zones full of flying lead and exploding grenades or eerily quiet with boat-hook wielding gangs? If a fight breaks out, do they have a chance against the locals? The personality of your world will influence the actions of your players. It will give them insight into the proper times and places for talking, shooting or running away. In addition to their actions, the atmosphere will affect how they feel. The mood of the situation can make them braver, bloodier, more sensitive or more scared.

PACING

Nothing ever happens slowly here. Things may slow down but they never reach slow. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, there should be a definite feeling of motion. Cyberpunks' lives are constantly in motion. Even when they're not really doing anything, there should be some kind of tension or expectation that something is going to occur or is already happening. There should always be several short-term goals just around the corner and if the players are really visionary, a long-term goal or two. Remember that the cyberpunk generation is gifted with energy but cursed with shortsightedness. This doesn't mean

that there should be chases and firefights just waiting to break out all the time. It just means that the NPCs should look like, and the players should be, in a constant state of motion. Characters and NPCs should have compelling personal missions. They may not be ambitious or exciting goals, but in the circles the players will be moving through, almost everyone will have one.

THE WORLD OF 2020

Cyberpunk is not the post apocalypse! There has been no great disaster that has gutted all civilization as we know it. The Crash of '94 may have been the single most horrible economic disaster ever and the Middle East may have had a few nuclear exchanges but there was no mega-oops that started it all. Civilization was not destroyed, just *changed*.

Why do the core of cyberpunk-type worlds look like they have gone to hell in a glass-fiber, reinforced, cyber-augmented hand-basket then? Earth 2020 is such a lump of polluted and burnt rock because people just don't care. Pointing fingers at the corporations as the evil behind it all won't help. Who buys the products that keep the companies in business? People hear about the various questionable things done higher up and as long as it doesn't hurt them, they look the other way. That is why Earth 2020 is in such sorry shape. But that's not all, is it? What makes the deplorable environments of 2020, inside and outside of the cities, so ironic is that they don't have to be that way. Remember about cyberpunk technology constantly moving forward? The science of *Cyberpunk 2020* and other cyberpunk worlds is usually advanced enough to repair the environment—it's just more profitable to wreck it. Building arcologies centralizes consumer population at the expense of human psychological space requirements. Dumping waste materials into a harbor is cheaper than processing them. Cutting down forests is quick money for poor third world countries. It all boils down to the dollar, yen, newyen, eurodollar or whatever you pay the bills and buy the big toys with.

GM CONTROL AND THE POWER PLAYER PROBLEM

ROSS "SPYKE" WINN—

ESTABLISHMENT

It is very important for the Referee to establish control in the beginning. If the Referee has not controlled anything from the start, then the players will run roughshod over the Referee.

The Referee can establish control most easily by having a well-planned campaign. If the Referee has been an integral part of the character conceptualization and generation process, then there are ample hooks and schemes to embroil the players in. Most Referee's lose control when the players don't have a goal, or become bored with the story.

If a player, or all the players, are bored they usually begin to do "stupid" things (just to get attention). Some Refs might read this as a personal attack, and try to dominate the game. What the Ref should see is a cry for help.

CONTROL VS. DOMINANCE

Refereeing a *Cyberpunk* game is no easy task. A *Cyberpunk* Referee must have ideas of style, theme, pacing, and characters. A poor Referee feels it is his job to beat the players. This is where the problems start.

Control is a fine line. If a Referee feels the players are destroying what they have made, then the less experienced (or immature) Referee may take this as a sign of personal disapproval. Some Referees can become angry and lash out at the players. Putting them in untenable situations, or refusing them actions that would normally be allowed. Even destroying the Team by violent means, and storming off into the night. If the Players feel this is happening they should stop play immediately and discuss it. No one wins if everyone shows up just to keep from alienating the Referee. Usually this only makes the problem worse. If the game is not

going where the group wants then maybe it should be modified. If the players feel that nothing they do is important then the Ref should examine the game closely.

The players must know that their actions are affecting on the world around them. If an action that the players want will upset something the Referee wants to do, then the Ref must either steer the characters away from that action (gently), or redesign a few of their ideas. Control is subtle, like making it easier for the players to escape than fight it out. Dominance is crass, like killing a member of the Team who seems to be usurping the Ref's control. A Referee must look inside as well as outside to find the problems in their campaign. A large part of the problem is usually the Referee.

THE STYLE PROBLEM

The problem in 2020 is that technology can make you invincible. The solution is that technology is threatening.

Take your average terribly misinformed *Cyberpunk* player. He walks into a chic Night City club, bristling with death. He carries a buffet of firearms, a melange of grenades, and full MetalGear™. He will not get a good table. In fact he will probably not even get in. He will simply be told that no tables are available.

Cyberpunk 2020 is a game where it is better to look good doing something than be good doing it. No one wants a tank for a neighbor. The police are going to harass this guy to no end. The third day he walks out of his horridly overpriced apartment (the landlord knows there will be damages) he will find a MaxTac squad waiting to deliver him a warrant for his arrest. Everyone in town will know about this guy, and avoid him like the plague.

The real movers in 2020 are subtle. Even Morgan Blackhand agrees that it is best to conceal your firepower until it's absolutely necessary. No one cares if you wear a little protection; but if you go around planning to be shot at, no one will want to stand in the same building with you. Conceal your strengths. If you stride into the room looking like you haven't got a care in the world, everyone will wonder why. It makes you attractive and mysterious, because everyone has a care in this world.

Now I'm not saying that you shouldn't be prepared, but make the players think style. If they want to wear armor, it should be the latest cut Japanese or Euro-couture—unless they're going for that retro thing that's sooo last season. In terms of packing heat, style over function. Since no one goes to the clubs "dressed to kill," a high powered firearm is not necessary, accuracy is. Don't even think of that old blued finish. If it can be seen, it should look good.

Accessorize, accessorize, accessorize. Urban Chic, Eurostyle, the Homeless Look, go for it. The outfit can't clash, or that input you fancy will tell you to dumpster-dive for a new look.

MONEY

Did I forget to mention that all this stuff costs? As the up-and-coming Edge-runner knows, all this stuff costs money. Information, at least reputable information, costs a great deal of money. Guns cost money, especially when bought in the black market. Good clothes, good food, and maintaining good contacts all cost money. So does a safe place to live, the therapy that keeps you sane, and the skin-jobs that make it easier for the police to miss you in a crowd. Not to mention that if you have to launder anything, the going rate is probably 30-60% (even as high as 90%), depending on the illegality of what you are fencing.

Player-Characters don't always get the "list price" for stuff they steal, sell, or do. Much of this is very well-covered in *Wildside*, but if that is not available then remember to use the ideas given here as a guideline. It is a well documented fact that most counterfeiters get between ten and twenty percent of the list price of a given "run" from a fence. Before they even get that, they have to find someone who will move the fake bills for them. Charge the players whatever the market will bear. If they go to a Fixer and say "I need a gun, now" then they are going to pay more. The Fixer will probably feel their urgency, and charge accordingly..

If someone hits it big, and wants to move into more prestigious circles, then they have to spend even more maintaining their network. If your organization is moving a few hundred-thousand a year, your messenger boy is going to want a car. Your play-

The average Edgerunner should spend thirty to forty percent of his income on the essentials (food, crash space, clothing), thirty percent on work stuff (guns, ammo, tech support, aides), and the rest on maintaining reputation (information and organization). A very successful edgerunner, or one that can cut costs as part of a team, can usually "bank" about ten percent. These funds are usually invested in very stable, portable forms. Gold, opals or other precious stones/metals are the usual, but anything that meets the qualifications is usually acceptable.

SO WHAT DOES IT REALLY COST?

• LEGAL STUFF:
Clothes, food, and consumer goods usually cost the listed price.

• GREY MARKET:
Legal stuff you don't want traced, or that "fell of a truck". 25% to 50% if it's inane, 150-200% if it could be used in commission of a crime.

• BLACK MARKET:
As far as the guy who sold it to you is concerned you don't exist, he doesn't exist, and none of this stuff exists. No less than 300% of list price. If the police catch you with this stuff you will probably be jailed for 1-6 years just for possession. If they catch you using it... Bye, Bye.

• CUSTOM:
Chill newtech and programs, guns that are totally custom, all the stuff the cryo' Edgerunner just has to have. No less than 400% of list price. Originals from a prestigious designer, or military newtech 600%. If the Police catch you with stuff of this level they will probably just shoot you and fence it. If you do go to jail, plan on doing a very short life-sentence. If the Military comes to get you, then you never existed.

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ers will need assistants and aides that don't come cheap. They don't want them going over to the competition for a lousy hundred euro a week. Make the players think about it; not tipping the maitre'd usually results in lost reservation and loss of face.

REPUTATION

You wouldn't be caught dead in an off-the-rack suit. In other words, the players don't have to spend all this money. They don't have to make the scene. If they don't, they are going to have free-time to spare. They won't be working, or making money. After a few weeks, if they do show up, everyone will have heard they were dead. After a few months, if they don't show up, they will be dead.

These expenses are part of what it costs to do business in 2020. So Referees shouldn't be scared of letting the characters make money. They will have to spend it, or they will dry up and blow away.

A simple rule is for every month that the player does not fully (50% or more) maintain their financial responsibilities, they lose one point of Reputation. If they choose to ignore all responsibilities, totally, then subtract three per month. Soon no one will know them, and no one will care. They can get back two points per month of their rep by spending twice the normal amount of time, money, or both on their responsibilities (Ref's Discretion).

The whole idea of reputation is very important to a 2020 character. A good way to make the players remember, think about, and use their reputations is giving the character's reps at the beginning of the campaign. A character's rep should usually be no less than half the special ability score. Some Referees may also choose to require that the players purchase reputations in the conception period. If a Ref allows players to purchase reputations they shoud be bought as a pickup skill.

It is also possible to have multiple reputations. Netrunners are most familiar with this. In the Net they are are a god, but to their neighbors they are "that quiet boy in 2-C." Certain types of fixers are also similarly perplexing. If you have, and use, two different identities then you will have two reputations.

THE MECHANICS PROBLEM

STATISTICAL RANGE IN CYBERPUNK 2020

Cyberpunk 2020 is a remarkable game in many respects (you already feel this way or you would not have bought this book). One of the most positive things about it is that it is a success-oriented system. An average character, with an average skill, has a better than 50% chance of succeeding in an average task. Many older games made the completion of even the simplest skilled tasks too difficult. Cyberpunk 2020 has positive modifiers that make it impossible for a technician to fail screwing in a light bulb.

For the Referee to see the simplicity and ease of use they have to understand some baselines in 2020.

AVERAGES

In Cyberpunk 2020 there are a lot of accepted means and averages that have never been fully explained. If Refs see where the real averages are they will have an easier time setting targets at the higher levels.

The character statistic average is six. As you can see, if you base the targets on the average stat then the "average" Edgerunner is going to have a large advantage. The average skill is four. So again, in many respects, the "average" Edgerunner will be quite above the norm. With this average stat and average skill an average task will require a roll of five. Which is, coincidentally, an average roll. If the standard bonus (for correct tools and average preparation) is added, that drops the roll to three.

Referees will understand after only a few games that many, if not all, Cyberpunk characters they have in their campaigns are drastically above average. Different types of tasks have differing needs in terms of targets, and modifiers, but all must be in proportion to the size and averages in the party.

PLAYERS, TASKS, AND ABILITIES

The problem is that Referees tend to forget that there are only a few types of tasks. There are plot tasks, social tasks, combat tasks,

and perception tasks. There are other types as well, but space dictates we only hit the most important.

PLOT TASKS

Plot tasks are the most misunderstood. When the Ref looks at the flow of a campaign, they should see tasks. Some may prefer to call them goals, but that is just semantics. The Romance between the Hero and the NPC Femme Fatale will never cause the Team to seek her killer in episode four if the Hero flubs the whole romance from the start.

The Referee needs to see the flow of tasks in the Campaign. A studious Ref will feel a need to impress upon the players the importance of certain scenes. It does not need to be a bold hint. Refs can simply prepare a scene extensively. If the Ref pulls out a map of the bar, and several props, then the players will think this is a big shoot-out (and pay attention). After they see that the tenor of the room is one of romance, they will see that this is an important scene.

It is very important for the Referee to modify the die-roll necessary according to the current state of roleplaying. If the Ref feels the Team as a whole is acting well in character they should even consider an across-the-board party bonus. As always, individual players should also be awarded bonuses for exceptional, and even very good roleplaying.

SOCIAL TASKS

Social tasks are most usually modified by the Referee. If a player says they are going to proposition a waiter in a local bar then that is just declaring an action. If he waltzes up with a line and a quick wit he may get a bonus. The Referee should always remember three things in a social situation: How is the character perceived (does he smell, what's her rep, etc.), how the character is skilled, and how the player roleplays the encounter. On final note, many players will see these modifiers as cheating. If good roleplaying is considered cheating, then so be it! The players have to realize that this is a style game, and if the Ref gives a bonus for style then they had better be stylish. To make it simpler, just tell the players to roll a die and don't tell them the target number, or task difficulty. What the Ref is doing is trying to facilitate the story, and keep it balanced. There is always

the possibility of failure bringing about good roleplaying, so the Ref should be cautious.

AWARENESS TASKS

The one point in *CP2020* Refereeing that constantly gets misrepresented is **Awareness** skill. Because **Combat Sense** is added to **Awareness** in some situations, some Referees allow it in all the time. This is a mistake. **Combat Sense** relates to one aspect of the game—combat. Just because a Solo has hyped killing-sense does not mean that they can realize that woman in the corner of the room is trying to get his attention romantically.

This is especially true in terms of technical matters. If a Solo does not know a computer chip from a doorstop, then they will not realize it is broken. When refereeing, be sure that the players understand the limits as well the capabilities of their skills and abilities.

At the same time, players of any Role should get bonuses if the **Awareness** task directly relates to their Special Ability; if a Medtech gets a fairly good **Awareness** roll, they may not realize they are walking into an ambush, but they will notice that the "Judas" is sweating profusely.

BENJAMIN WRIGHT—

A player is out of control. What do you do? Referees, you've got the power—just use it! Pop 'em like a zit; have a random netrunner erase their bank accounts. Plant traps they could never, ever, possibly anticipate (or escape from)! Infect them with Lepro-II, colon cancer, the hiccups and several other horrible diseases!! Rock the site from orbit—it's the only way to be sure!!!

Ahem. There are so many entertaining ways to deal with power players that when a Player becomes a problem, the GM is obligated to give the character problems, too. This is very convenient for the GM because within the roleplaying world s/he's almighty. If s/he so wishes, the referee can crush a power player like a bug. Unfortunately, some people have this preoccupation with playing fair...not very *Cyberpunk*, but pretty much essential to good roleplaying.

Fair play demands that referees do not wish plagues of cybernetic locusts and other

computer bugs on their PCs for no apparent reason. This is the crux of the problem posed by a power player—correcting fairly someone who is not playing fairly. The way to do this is to use good roleplaying to counteract bad roleplaying. This is where the player's reputation comes back to haunt them.

In short, if a character insists on becoming really (fill in the blank—rich, powerful, wicked with a cyberdeck, whatever), s/he is going to build up a pretty big Reputation. As is described in *Cyberpunk 2020*, a 1D10 roll lower than the PC's Reputation means that they are known. Well, gatos, when someone has a big rep as a badass, posers, solo wanabes and other gonks are always trying to steal the crown. In essence, Reputation can be used as a control; if a PC turns himself into the neighborhood porky then all the gangbangers, punks and thugs will constantly be trying to take 'em down just so they can win drinks off the story. Same goes for power, money, influence and everything else. If you're a bigshot, all the little fish will want you out of the way.

Go ahead and torture that power player. Make 'em hate their own prowess. They'll learn from their mistake when they finally get taken down by some snotnose with a polymer one-shot while they're getting it on with their input. Their next character will know that subtlety is the better part of power.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: THE MODERN-DAY MYTHOLOGY

While maintaining control over the players can be a relatively aggravating task, the *Cyberpunk* referee faces an equal challenge from Technology. It is a major "player" in any *Cyberpunk* campaign (that is, it "plays an important part" in any campaign) and can be as tricky and troublesome as any power-crazed player-character.

Technology, like art, sure is one slippery fish—it can easily get out of hand. Because the 21st century is faced with an ever-increasing technology curve, many campaigns center around new scientific developments and gadgets. Beware! The temptation to constantly introduce new technologies is a trap. Just as the unenlightened use of technology can lead to disaster in the real world, the careless introduction of new technologies in a Cyberpunk campaign buys a one-way ticket to paradoxland.

Consider this little story: a *Cyberpunk* referee I met at a convention was speaking to me about the possibility of a Techie Book. He wanted rules for creating new devices, and went on to describe a gadget one of his player-characters built—a backpack-portable generator which emits a magnetic field capable of slowing down, stopping and even reversing bullets. I didn't know what to say at the time, but please allow me to take this opportunity to say NO. There are countless reasons why this gadget wouldn't work, but the major ones are: (1) Bullets are usually lead (sometimes plastic, steel, rubber, etc) and thus most are not susceptible to magnetism, (2) the field generated by this device would do irreparable harm to someone who wore it on their back, (3) this field would short out the cyberware and other electronics of the wearer and anyone or anything near him. On top of all that, such a device is not even science-fiction, it's science-fantasy—magic-level tech with no modern explanation.

Many would argue that many of the technologies in *Cyberpunk* exhibit the same fantastic characteristics. That is debatable, but be that as it may, the seeming incongruencies in 2020's tech level exist for a reason: *Cyberpunk* is a metaphor for today, and the ideas of cybernetics and artificial intelligence are symbolic of the sense of alienation and de-humanization which occurs in a post-modern society. True, technology advancing unchecked by conscience or control is a powerful theme in *Cyberpunk*, but the staples of "hard science-fiction" (such as death rays, force fields, teleportation and aliens) are shunned. Techno-cynicism has replaced the Victorian ideal of science as savior.

A *Cyberpunk* referee must always keep in mind the relative tech level of their cyberpunk gaming environment. True, in an interstellar *Cyberpunk* campaign (as hinted at in *Deep Space* pg.49) the average tech level would be higher than that of a dusty-dirty Nomad campaign, but the overall tech level (that is, the level of technological evolution that has been achieved) would be the same—the spacers would just get to see a lot more of the high-tech stuff than the Nomads. The "classic" Night City campaign has a pretty clearly-defined tech level; it's technology curve may be threateningly steep, but some things just won't fly.

The problem posed to the *Cyberpunk* referee is to understand what will fly and why. This does not just translate to usefulness within the context of the dice and the game's system, nor just to what is technologically feasible, but also to the sociological consequences and ramifications of technology. Technology does not exist in a vacuum—it has effects on the environment, society and the human psyche. Technology is no toy. The corporations don't seem to understand that, but a *Cyberpunk* referee should. To help referees get a better grip on what they and their players are dealing with, new technological developments will be broken down into four Levels:

0 — An existing technology adapted to a new use.

1 — A modification, refinement or improvement (minor or major) of an existing technology.

2 — A new technology for an existing use (a new method).

3 — A new technology with a new use (a totally new idea).

Level 0 developments are omnipresent in *Cyberpunk*: one of William Gibson's favorite concepts is that the Street finds its own uses for things. Level 0 is what Techies (and Tinkertots in *CyberGeneration*) were born to do, like turning a cellular phone into a wide-band radio scanner or somesuch—happens all the time.

Level 1 developments come from upgrading, customization, tune-ups, add-ons, and other pretty common stuff—it's the realm of talented individuals and competent groups. Modifying an off-the-shelf cyberdeck for better performance is a typical Level 1 development. When the improvements really get drastic, then Level 1 can mean countless hours of research, work and testing. Level 1 should require some serious work on the part of a PC, but referees should feel pretty free to allow such developments as long as they're reasonable.

Level 2 developments are truly ground-breaking, and as such are pretty rare. However, a Level 2 development is still doing something which has been done before—it's just doing it through a new idea. An example of a Level 2 development is Electrothermal Enhancement (*Chromebook 2* pg. 50), which still shoots bullets from a gun but does it in a really remarkable new way. PCs should not generally be able to come up with Level 2 tech unless they're

major geniuses and/or devote a good chunk of their lives to it. Even the referee (who has all the corporations and governments doing his bidding) should try not to play with Level 2; it tends to upset game balance and render a lot of things obsolete.

Level 3 is scary. These are planet-changing, history-changing developments like fire, the wheel, electric power, the nuclear bomb; cyberware, AI and the Stage-7 cloning which is seen in *Land of the Free*. Level 3 developments should almost never occur, becuase stuff that changes the world so drastically doesn't come around too often. Player-characters should never, ever (I mean it), EVER come up with Level 3 technology—they might encounter it once in a lifetime (see *Land of the Free* again), but never invent it. Referees should also shun from playing with Level 3—it tends to turn the entire campaign on its ear. The bullet-reversing force field is definitely a Level 3 development; it would pretty much render guns useless in a military context, and probably have offshoot uses like flying belts and the required hardening of all electronics everywhere (expensive).

With each Level, the referee's caution should increase. It may be tempting to throw some earth-shaking new technology into the campaign to shake up the characters, but threatening their lives with a flamethrower or sticking them in a romantic triangle works just as well. Really. Besides, there are already so many world-changing technologies in *Cyberpunk* that nobody could ever run campaigns which explore them all. Consider the three steps in the evolution of the *Cyberpunk* game: 1990s to 2013, 2013 to 2020 and 2020 to 2027.

The jump from the 1990s to 2013 saw the advent of cloned replacement body parts, maglev vehicles, the AV-series of vehicles, the Net, advanced personal weapons and armor, braindance, cyberware and the ability to copy a human mind into a computer (the Soulkiller program). The jump from 2013 to 2020 brought arcologies, autolathes, powered armor, AI, nanotech, cloning and the ability to download a personality into a cloned body (the Phoenix program and the creation of the Stage-7 clone Adriana). In the future, the leap from 2020 to 2027 will include microfactories, sensory grids, spinners, totally electronic weapons, nanocircuits, virtuality and the mysterious Carbon Plague. Now you tell me, Cyberpunkers, isn't that enough?

Referees must have the self-control to reject tech that's unreasonable for *Cyberpunk*, to withhold high-tech in a low-tech campaign and to accommodate the clever use of tech by player-characters. What has been learned cannot be unlearned—when someone invents a new technology, society absorbs it and is changed. New technology cannot and will not be contained.

ERIC HEISSERER— WHAT IS A "POWER PLAYER"?

Before I launch into this chapter and explain how to methodically dismantle a power player in your gaming group, let me first define one. A power player is someone who abuses the tools provided for him in a game for his own purposes to such an extent that it disturbs the other players, the balance of the campaign, or the mechanics of the system. The tools used by power players are usually knowledge or experience, system loopholes, money, equipment, and even dice.

In order to prevent a power player from abusing your game with his bag of tricks, you need to know his motivations. Generally, a power player is someone who is more experienced and more comfortable in a wargaming environment. His concept of goals are different than that of a roleplaying format—instead of working to achieve a team-based objective, he puts his efforts into "advancing" his own character within the game with little regard to the safety of the other player characters. He considers the referee an opponent instead of a mediator, and tries to outsmart the GM through a variety of tricks and tactics. Most of all he plays to win, which means he is confused about or apathetic to the purpose of a roleplaying game.

Converting him to the concept of roleplaying is a difficult task, and it isn't necessarily the role of the GM to do so. If you are running a roleplaying campaign and you have an abusive player, you usually have one option: elimination. This means elimination from the game and/or the group. But a good referee doesn't need to kill a character when that player oversteps his bounds. A clever GM will let the player do it to himself, by presenting the consequences of his character's

actions. This stops the problem player in his tracks if executed correctly.

For example, a power player might have his character shoot a 3-round burst at an important NPC just because he "didn't like the guy." The NPC dies on the spot. Wonderful. The referee immediately gets his point across to the player that crime doesn't pay: a cop conveniently nearby witness the murder. An arrest and jail sentence is a wonderful tool to illustrate that characters must face the consequences of their actions. Remember, you don't have to put up with abusive players. Period. You're trying to run an effective *Cyberpunk* game, and the last thing you need is someone trying to take advantage of you or the system.

WHAT IS NOT A POWER PLAYER

Players can be very crafty and creative when you least expect them. If a clever action is taken by a PC that alters or destroys your plot (and just your plot), don't get bent out of shape. These things happen. The clever player doesn't deserve to be stopped or punished just because he thought of something you didn't. If he's not disturbing the power balance of the game, reward him for this crafty thinking, offer a moment of silence for the deceased plotline, and move on.

Some players have wargaming tendencies, but are sincerely interested in roleplaying. Just like flashbacks, some players will automatically fall into a strategic or tactical mode when a shot is fired during a roleplaying session. These people don't need to be stopped as much as they need to be steered in the right direction. It's best to start soft and get harder on your problem player, because you give him the chance to change and form better roleplaying habits.

Of course, some people never catch on. They must be neutralized and eliminated from the game altogether. Don't feel that you've failed as a referee just because you couldn't get a power player to change his ways.

Before you can stop the abuse you need to identify the type of power player you have and the tool(s) he is using to disrupt the game. Following is a list of power players, with a solution for each method of abuse. The solutions are divided into three sections: steering, stopping, and neutralizing. Try to follow these steps when dealing

with power players. Give them a chance to understand the game and the way you run things. If it still doesn't work out, nuke 'em.

THE TYPES OF POWER PLAYERS
MAJOR LEAGUE POWER PLAYERS

PLAYER: THE GURU
TOOL(S): KNOWLEDGE/EXPERIENCE

The Guru is someone who has experience or knowledge (usually minimal) in one or more game-related topics, and uses his knowledge to abuse the game. The Guru usually probes to find out the extent of his referee's knowledge, and then uses his own "experience" to justify system changes, scenario flaws, or rules variations on topics of which the referee has little or no knowledge. The Guru will do his best to establish that he is an expert in a category (military firearms, for example) and demand that he succeed in his endeavor because of some convenient piece of trivia (which may or may not be true). The Guru can be hot-tempered and arrogant, so watch your step.

Example: "All standard assault rifles have a five-round burst option, so my FN-RAL is equipped to do that, just so you know," says the Guru. There are no rules for five-round bursts in FFNF.

SOLUTIONS

Steering: The Guru is usually desperate for recognition, and he tries to get it by assuming he knows it all. Appeal to this in the steering stage by granting him a degree of knowledge, but let him know who's in charge: "I must admit I hadn't heard of a standard five-round burst, and it seems strange that the rulebook wouldn't mention something so standard, but I appreciate the weapons trivia. At this time, however, I have to disallow use of a five-round burst, as I haven't thought about the implications or written up any rules variations. I'll get back with you when I do." Be sure to write things down and read it back to him, so you quote him properly. If he's the least bit fibbing or exaggerating, he'll quiet down fast. Also, asking him to write down all of his rules variation ideas and submit them to you is a good way of steering his energy.

Stopping: You've been patient with him but he persists on manipulating the game to his advantage: "I've committed to this form of

(combat, damage, hit location) from the start of the campaign, and altering it now would only disturb the balance. This should not be the focus of a game, as it is wasting everyone's time. If you have questions about the listed equipment, we can talk after the session. I am open to changes, but not during play, in the middle of combat. That is all."

Neutralizing: He just won't quit complaining about the difference between his "personal experience" and the listed equipment. He's interrupted the scene and spread tension and frustration among the other players who are trying to solve the plot. Time to pause the game and take the player out for a talk. Explain that everyone is an expert in something, but everyone also knows that this is just a game, and therefore some disbelief must be suspended. Professional doctors may find the MedTechies of *Cyberpunk* deplorable, but it shouldn't stop them from enjoying the game. Computer programmers can play Netrunners without rewriting the system to suit their own prejudices. If he wants a game that tackles every tiny detail about firearms, he's going to have to look somewhere else. Adios.

PLAYER: THE RULES LAWYER
TOOL: SYSTEM LOOPHOLES

The Rules Lawyer is someone who studies the rulebook to a roleplaying game for the sole purpose of finding a "loophole" in the mechanics that he can expose and abuse. The Rules Lawyer feels completely safe in his exploitation of loopholes, because (as he will be quick to point out) "I'm only following the rules in the book." If you prevent him from using his loophole trick, he will usually attempt to gather a player "lynch mob" by constantly complaining about his thwarted efforts. The Rules Lawyer loves to argue and debate, so be careful.

Example: "On my turn I shoot my Ronin Light Assault at this guy, and I go full auto, then I spin around and belt out the last five shots at this guy over here at a -3, then I run behind this building over here which is within my movement allowance, and then I reload my Ronin with a fresh clip. Page 88 of the rulebook says that I can take more than one action at a -3 penalty to each successive action. The penalty really just applies to my second action, since there are no tests required by the rulebook to use MA or reload a weapon. So much for your bad guys."

Steering: Read the rules to the game. Try to take a "Rules Lawyer" approach if possible. You won't catch all the loopholes, but you may find some other pieces of information that can help you set the lawyer straight. Or, you can always interpret the rules to work for you. Just make sure you're consistent. "Actually, the -3 penalty also applies to initiative. Therefore, Guard #3 who is hiding behind cover moves before you get a chance to run for cover, and he takes a shot at you…"

Stopping: You've read the rules, you've made your changes, but he still abuses the loopholes. Time to up the ante, so to speak. "A round lasts approximately 3 seconds, as it says in the rulebook. That gives you just enough time to empty your clip. Unfortunately, you didn't know the time would slip by so fast—you're now in the open and out of ammunition. Guard #3 screams 'my brother!' as the second guard falls, and he fires a burst from his assault rifle at you. Two hits!"

Neutralizing: It's now been a few sessions, and you realize that the player is only interested in publicizing and abusing rules discrepancies. He's demanded to get away with it because the rules don't say he can't, and you want to strangle him. Do your best to catch him in his own loophole: "Guard #2 is still up, and on his turn he runs over to your location, empties his assault rifle in you at point blank range at -3, reloads his gun, and then empties it in you again at -9. Fortunately, his odds are pretty good because he's so close. If you want to abuse the game, I will too. It's silly to be able to do this, and you know it, but you don't care. Just because the system has flaws doesn't mean it's open season on the referee. Thank you and goodbye."

PLAYER: THE CON ARTIST
TOOLS: DICE, CHARACTER SHEETS

The Con Artist loves to win in the worst way, and he loves to be the center of attention. The Con Artist cannot understand the difference between a team leader and an attention hog, so it becomes difficult to calm him down. He is also afraid of failure and rejection to such an extent that he cheats on die rolls and character information. He has a few tricks up his sleeve to try and ensure success at whatever he does:

• prematurely rolling the dice for his character until the dice present a decent number, then attempting to use that roll for an action on his turn,

• telling the referee that he succeeded rather than giving the referee a number value for a skill test result,

• stating that he has points in a skill when he has none,

• adding points to skills during specific tests, and

• lying about or hiding the result of a die roll and inventing a number.

The Con Artist is the obnoxious power player of the bunch, because he is overtly cheating at the game, which is an insult to the referee and the other players who are playing fairly. Personally, I loathe the Con Artists the most.

Example: "I rolled a 28, and that's to shoot and kill those two guards standing together," says the Con Artist. He rolls a ten-sider twice and picks up the die before anyone can see the results: "head shot and another head shot!"

SOLUTIONS

Steering: When this first happens, lay down the rules about dice rolling and action announcement immediately. Don't let him get away with this even once, or it will come back to haunt you. "Let me explain now: when combat ensues, I will first go around the room and ask each player to announce his action. Once you announce your action you are committed to it, no matter what happens during that round. A lot happens in three seconds and no human can possibly anticipate it all. When it comes to your turn, I will remind you of your action, ask you to roll for any tests, and we'll go from there. There is no need to roll before it's your turn. This is for everyone's benefit."

Stopping: So he does it again. Or he pulls another trick on you. His luck is too good to be true and his character is flawless. Time to put your foot down. Get a copy of his character sheet before a session and see if you can catch him in a lie. "What did you roll for your **Athletics** test— A nine? And the result was a 25? I beg to differ with you, because on your character sheet here you have no points in Athletics, and with a 9 Reflex your result should be 18, not 25. Explain how you got a 25 to the group, so we can locate where the math went wrong." Also remember that you can always reroll something if it becomes an issue for debate.

Neutralizing: The Con Artist is increasingly frustrated because you have forced him to accept the roll of the dice, and now he's lashing out purposefully to hinder the progress of the game. He's doing anything he can to ensure his success in the game, and in doing so he's endangering the other PCs. That's the last straw. Beat him at his own game by allowing a false assumption. "Roll a ten-sider for me, please. You rolled a ten? Really? Did anyone see it? That's okay, roll again. A seven? Wow. Well, you needed to roll under your reflex to keep from being surprised by this guy, but you failed, so he gets the first move in combat and he shoots you. [Roll a die behind the screen.] Head shot!" After that, it's time to take your Con Artist out of the room and say goodbye before he disrupts the rest of the game.

MINOR LEAGUE POWER PLAYERS
PLAYER: THE BIG SPENDER
TOOL: MONEY

This player is similar to the Rules Lawyer in that he assumes the prices for all weapons and equipment noted in the rulebook are set in stone. Any price inflation on the part of the referee is deemed 'unfair' by the Big Spender. The Spender has no understanding of the term Black Market, and he demands to be able to purchase any item with a price tag on it, whether it's in the main book, a *Chromebook*, or one of the other supplements. He's generated a character strictly for financial gain. If it's for sale (and even if it isn't) he'll buy it.

Tip: Money can do a lot of things. If used to purchase something expensive and even slightly conspicuous, it's going to rouse suspicion in someone. That someone could be the F.B.I. (or similar organization), the Mafia, the megacorporations, or even other black-ops teams. If the Big Spender is so interested in that laser cannon, let him have it. Then have him make Awareness checks constantly—is someone following him? Was that a police AV hovering above him? Didn't he see that stranger yesterday? Eventually, he'll either want to rid himself of the item, or he'll walk into a trap and get mugged or murdered. Here's another tactic: let him have an expensive or dangerous item at a reduced cost. Tell him it's on sale…50% off, or some ridiculous discount. Is he suddenly suspicious? Does he still want to purchase the item? Give him a wicked grin as you sell it to him—"yeah, yeah, half price, that's it. C'mon, you want it or not?" That usually stops a Big Spender.

PLAYER: THE G.I. DUNNO MAKER (A.K.A. THE SWARZENNEGGER)
TOOL: POINT ALLOWANCES/MAXIMUMS

This player puts all his points and energy into reaching and maintaining the maximums for his character—mainly the physical attributes, the special abilities, and the combat skills. You can recognize a G.I. Dunno by his high Reflex (>10 w/cyberware), Body (usually 14 w/bioware), Combat Sense (always a 10), and weapon skills like Handgun, Rifle, or Submachine Gun (8-10 in at least one). Contrasting his abnormally beefy stats are such molested areas as Attractiveness (maybe a 3 or 4), Luck (a 2—who needs luck?), and a horde of overlooked career and pickup skills.

Tip: The G.I. Dunno Maker is fairly easy to diffuse because his characters are almost useless in any situation except combat. The player will eventually realize that his character needs more useful skills to become an active participant, and hopefully he'll work with you to restructure his character. If you offer combat often in your game, and G.I. Dunno tips the scale too much in his favor, you can focus in on his weak points during other parts of the game, like his Attractiveness or his social skills. Have the team lose business because of the G.I.'s behavior or looks. Let the player know his character has a problem; he's strong as a tank but he can't function outside of combat. Hopefully, the player will fix things up. If not, fry the G.I. with a high-powered microwaver. Poof.

BETTER KILLING THROUGH TECHNOLOGY
DEALING WITH TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a solid standard of measure to calculate the power level of a campaign. The amount of technology in circulation directly affects the power of a game: the more you have, the more powerful you'll be.

Because of this, referees can lose a certain amount of control in their Cyberpunk game if they don't introduce new ways to limit the technology and its use.

LIMITING TECHNOLOGY

As cyberware, bioware, electronics, and weapons are introduced, popular or powerful contenders will surface. Popular items vary slightly with each gaming group, but there are a few technological 'staples' in games that can dramatically alter the power level, usually in the players' favor. I'll touch on a couple of these items, and present some methods to limit their use.

SKINWEAVE

Everyone gets it. Everyone loves it. Standard Skinweave offers protection of SP 12—this is good stuff. Of course, you can throw away most of your autopistols now, they won't be much more than a nuisance to your PCs. Put a light armor jacket over the skin and suddenly you're shirking damage left and right. The only dramatic moments are when the Militech grunt unleashes his assault rifle at you. Even then, the average roll on 6D6 is 21, putting heavy ARs at 23 points of damage normally. And these are the big guns, ladies and gentlemen. With Skinweave 12 and a light armor trenchcoat (let's say SP6), 5 points penetrate on average. A character's BTM takes care of the rest, and he fills in one box. Not bad for being in the way of a metal projectile traveling at an incredible speed. So what do you do to limit Skinweave?

System Rejection: The character has had his Skinweave for a while, but suddenly he starts to notice rashes developing on his arms and legs. He's losing hair. A strange, viscous liquid starts to leak from his pores. Is he dying? No, but his body has an allergy or other problem with the Skinweave bioware, and he needs to get it removed before the problem gets worse and his face starts to dissolve. Sorry, Charlie.

Bioplague: A bioplague hits Night City (or your location), and it is reported to be engineered to "piggyback" on the same DNA strands that compose Skinweave. The bioplague lies dormant until the epidermis receives shock (like the impact of a bullet), then rides the adrenaline in to the heart, where it kills the victim instantly. Time to shed that skin armor and fast!

Super Nanites—The Solo purchased Skinweave 12, but over the past few days he's noticed his skin getting harder and harder...It seems the bioware doesn't know when to quit armoring his flesh! If it keeps up, he'll be as tough (and as immobile) as a rock statue! Oops. Guess it's back to armor jackets and helmets for him.

CHIPWARE SOCKET

Occasionally, players can get 'chip happy.' Someone will realize that putting one or two points into a skill is no better (or worse) than a default roll, so he'll throw all of his skill points into a few select skills, then purchase skill chips at Level 3 for a dozen other tasks or languages. This can tip the power scale in the party, as the chip fanatic has many more skills at an operational level than the other characters...and he always can buy more. As the concept of chippin' in is part of the *Cyberpunk* attitude, you shouldn't deny players the opportunity to use their sockets this way. You can sober them to the risks that come with the package, however. Here are a few suggestions:

Processor Lockup: The Corporate shakes hands with a powerful Hayashi executive and introduces himself in Japanese when the language chip temporarily freezes—the Corp is cuaght in mid-sentence. He still has motor skills and his native tongue, but his Japanese is off-line until he extracts the chip, reconnects it, and initializes it with his neuralware processor. If it's a bad lockup, he might lose speech altogether. This isn't fatal, but it is embarassing (not to mention bad protocol). More fatal lockups occur with combat chips during melee...ouch!

The Big Brother Syndrome: One chip has a small virus program that copies itself onto the neuralware processor (deleting data if necessary) and acts as a behavior control unit specified to the identification of a certain symbol (like the Arasaka logo). Joe Solo chips in with his new Japanese Language Learner, and things are fine until he catches sight of a security guard's uniform... Something calms him down when he sees that guard. The guy even shows up as 'friend' on his Friend/Foe Identifier with his new Marquee software. If he were to shoot that guard, would he really be able to pull the trigger? This is only one angle you can take with

Big Brother. Nastier versions could mess with a PC's motor neurons and either force an epileptic seizure or cause paralysis.

The Malevolent Microwaver: It's a crowded dance floor, and one of the rockergirls is suddenly tired or frightened of her aggressive partner. She pulls out her handheld microwaver (2020's version of MACE) and pops the sleazy chromer in the head. Oops—the area of effect is just a little bit bigger than expected, and Mr. Chipware gets caught in the pulse of radiation along with three others nearby. So much for all of his chips! If he didn't have his processor shielded, he'll also have problems in the future with basic functions like interface links (like smartguns and vehicles), initiative rolls, and even INT-based skills. And to fix a processor, they gotta get back into your skull. "Is there a Ripperdoc in the house?"

If you Giveth, you can Taketh Away. It's as simple as that. Happy 'punking!

CHARLIE WONG—

GM CONTROL: HOW TO STOP, STEER OR NEUTRALIZE POWER PLAYERS

> "He doesn't scare me. He makes a power character, I drop an elephant on it. He makes a bigger and meaner character, I use a heavier elephant. I got lots 'o elephants—figuratively."
>
> —Tony

Cyberpunk 2020 is a very free-form and versatile game system. Players can make characters in all shapes and sizes. While this can be a great benefit, it can also be a great curse. Most GMs will one day come across characters that are either too powerful or too devious for the campaign. This doesn't mean that a player is intentionally ruining your game, just that his style isn't suited for this game. Talk it over with the player and try to come to a compromise. Most players should be happy to tone things down. If the player doesn't want

to change or if the character doesn't have the justification, to save the game you may have to do something to the problem character. Nobody's unstoppable in *Cyberpunk* as long as the GM doesn't want him to be.

Here are some examples of situations and possible ways to analyze and counter them followed by more general ways of dealing with power players.

A pair of Fixers engineer a stock crash for the company they're working for. They cause a selling panic that drops the value of the company' stock through the floor. When it all bottoms out, the Fixers buy their parent company with funds loaned to them from backers.

When players start doing suspicious things, you might want to consider stalling them. Tell them it will take time and never get back to the topic. Then between games, research the questionable situation. A little snooping in a common encyclopedia for the example above would turn out the following information: After the Crash of '88, stock trading computers were made illegal because of their tendency to cause buying and selling landslides. Safeguards were also implemented on the stock exchanges that would lock a stock's value if it fell too much in a short time. Knowing this might keep those two fixers on the street and out of the penthouses a while longer.

A Netrunner builds a huge virtual reality game. He makes it compelling, fun and complex. He rents time on mainframes because he can't afford one himself. —yet. While people play his game, he uses subliminal suggestion to prime them for mind control programs. The zombified players go out and get more players and are compliant to the Netrunner's commands. Soon the Netrunner controls many of the most powerful people in the world with his hypnotizing game. Yes, this was before that Star Trek: TNG *episode.*

Sometimes it is important to ignore the rules when they are being abused. This character designed his VR when the numbers in the first edition of *Cyberpunk 2020* were off by orders of magnitude. Just because he found a loophole doesn't mean he should necessarily get away with it. Other ways to stop him would be to cut off his resources (kill the VR or hit the mainframes with pirate or rival Netrunners) or have him discovered (Medias looking into computer mind-control find him or his scheme is exposed by Netrunner do-gooders).

A Rocker turned Solo wannabe gets the enhancement job of the decade. Exotic implants, bioware, speedware, the works. He comes out of the operating room with a body that could rend most 'Platers and the mind of a player who's got the Solo drill down so well he could fight off a crack black-ops team while brushing his teeth.

Don't fight, if he's a power player, he's probably too good at it—think. Has he got enemies? Well, what if those enemies were to sneak some fatal sabotage warez into him while he's under the knife getting all those implants? One more won't be noticed by him until it's too late. He belongs to them now, and if doesn't do what they want, boom! He's painting the room.

A Medtech buys every body plating option available. This walking tank can now survive even the most withering fire for quite a long time. Anything that would do him in quick might damage entire city blocks. Totally fearless, this nearly indestructable RoboDoc wades into any fight to protect the weak and aid the injured.

Leave him alone. He's not doing anything really unbalancing to the game. He may be indestructable for all intents and purposes, but he's not really abusing it. He may be pushing the rules and hard to intimidate with heavy firepower, but this gentle giant doesn't try to cause uproars.

These examples are fine and good, but what if your power player problem doen't fit into any of those catagories? Well, the following is a list of mean things to do to players who have been bad. They fall into three catagories: **Warning, Disabling** and **Deadly**.

WARNINGS

For those soft-hearted GMs who don't want to smear a player who just crossed that thin line between acceptable and unreasonable. These are scare tactics that are designed to put the more squeemish power players back in their place.

Maim: Have an enemy thug cut off a hand, break a leg or poke out an eye. In 2020 these are only painful inconveniences since any of it can be replaced at a local Body Shoppe. What's important with the maiming routine is to emphasize that the thug is more powerful physically than the PC and that he's willing to come back and cut-off/break/poke-out more parts if it becomes necessary.

Break their toys: Wipe out a Netrunner's deck with some really powerful black ICE. Riddle a Nomad's bike or car full of holes in a drive-by shooting. Blow up a Corporate's conapt or a Solo's weapon stash. This is a slap on the hand that says that same thing as a Maim Warning but has the effect of "It could have been me" instead of "it was me." Somebody has taken the time to try to scare them away. Leave clues at the scene that say the damage was not random and whoever it was is willing to do it again if they have to. Maybe the PC won't be lucky enough to live through it next time.

Slander: Many characters in *Cyberpunk* depend on their contacts, friends and employees to operate at peak performance. By letting word out, truthful or otherwise, that undermines the character's image, a GM can slow a character down indirectly. The PC will lose contacts and be less trusted if the wrong word is floating through the street. A corporate suspected of imbezzling, a fixer who's a police informant, or a media who breaks promises of confidentiality.

DISABLINGS

These are more extreme measures that cripple the PC or the PC's ability to perform. Use these on characters that are just too unbalancing to let live but too interesting to kill. Be careful with disabling effects because they can cause players to despair and stop playing that character. To avoid player despair, leave a glimmer of hope for recovery/vindication/revenge.

Kidnapping: Steal a loved one or somebody the PC is honor-bound to help. Then make the PC do things for the hostage's continued safety. This can keep a character busy while your NPCs get their work done. Kidnappings can be used to make a PC do something, keep them away from someone/something, divulge information, pay money or anything else the GM can think of.

Nerve damage: This is great one for characters that depend heavily on one or two stats. Capture them and inject them with a poison or slip it into their kibble packs. Combat nanites would of course disable any toxin binders. Then apply a -4 to REF or BODY or COOL. There's always a cure if they have the millions it will take. This slows a character down while giving them a nemesis and long term goals. (Kill Fred who poisoned me and get the cure.) Yet it could be years before they have the money or the cure is perfected.

Sabotage Wares: Check out "The Catch" on pg 84 of your *Cyberpunk 2020*. These nasty implants and many others can control a character for his enemy as well as his company. Blinding pain, command kill, heart stop, internal bomb and monitoring. The character lives as long as he plays by the boss' rules and stays valuable. If the character has been given spy/monitor warez, their black ops will suddenly become sticky as secrets suddenly aren't anymore.

Bounties: Most cyberpunks break laws or cross people. Sometimes they become enough of a pain to hire people to eliminate them. The more a character abuses the system, the bigger the bounty on their head will be. The bigger the bounty, the more hunters. If the bounty is high enough, heavy hitters will begin showing up to cash in the character's head.

Drug Addiction/Blackmail: Make the character dependent on their worst enemy for drugs or to prevent the release of information that could ruin them. Any character can be captured and addicted to tailored drugs that there is only one supplier for. If a character's power is based on their social position (Corp, Media, Fixer, Nomad, Cop) try a meaner version of Slander. Scandalous information could cripple or destroy them. The info can either be real or really believable. A twist on the blackmail angle is to discredit the character outright. Smear campaigns, bad rumors, prison sentences and former lovers are just the beginning.

No Backup: Remove or capture the character's resources and force them to play by their new boss' rules or start over. Buy out a Corp's/Media's company. Bribe all the other officers on The Force. Undercut a Fixer's prices or offer something better to the consumers. Cut off supply of parts 'n programs to Techies & Netrunners. Change a Solo's status to "expendable" while they're in the field and about to call in reinforcements or evacuation AV's. Without backup, a character is reduced to bare wits and whatever equipment they happen to be carrying.

The Law: Lawyers, police, CIA, FBI, DEA, IRS and any other government group can be a real pain for your bad apples. If they break the law, the law may give them ATTENTION. Have the appropriate groups try to capture, kill, audit or recruit the offending character. Capture, kill and audit may be enough to make the character lay low or think twice about rampant crime and senseless destruction. If they're recruited, life becomes complicated very fast as they work for The Law now. Black ops for the country now instead of for the corporation, and they don't even get a choice or hazard pay.

Troublemakers: What if someone just wants the character to suffer for their sins? Netrunners, Spies, CyberClowns (with green hair and red noses), cute kids, game show hosts and even mother-in-laws can all be hired to make a character's life HELL. The Netrunners who keep giving your money to the United Way? That dumb bulletproof CyberClown that shows up and tells jokes to the crowd just as you're trying to sneak into an Arasaka base? Cute kids that need protection tagging along? That guy on TV who you don't even know who keeps making fun of you in front of millions? They were paid to do it.

DEADLY

So you've tried every trick in this book and you still can't keep the problem player in check? They're just too smart or too tough for your tricks? It's finally time to deal with this nuisance in a more permanent way. Somebody is going to make this PC an example of what happens when certain lines are crossed. Make it fair (give them a slim chance to figure it out or run away) and make sure it's obvious which NPC or group signed the termination order.

Assassins: The saying goes "no matter how good you are at something there is always someone who is better." It's time the PCs met these someones who are better than they are. Crack Netrunner teams and/or elite Solo squads have been scrambled to kick some ass. Their stats and skills should be maxed out (they're the best, right?) and they should have the cutting edge or beyond in technology—the latest weapons and fastest computers along with some things not in the books that you've been cooking up yourself. A little scheming can justify how they got anything. "Enzo pulled in some markers he had with old General Lundee from Militech."

CYBERPUNK SOCIOLOGY

MIKE PONDSMITH—

WHAT IS CYBERPUNK?

WHY WE WROTE IT. WHERE YOU'RE TAKING IT.

"**W**hat is *Cyberpunk*?" "Is it an attitude? A technology? A fusion of both?" "What were you thinking about when you wrote this game?" "Who are the cyberpunks and how do I join?" These are questions I've been asked constantly over the last four or five years; at conventions, in game stores, in seminars and lectures. My answer? Cyberpunk is what you're going to make it. After all, you're the cyberpunks. You've already joined. Now it's up to you to shape your own destiny.

A bit of explanation is required. What we define as cyberpunk is the near future, right? The technologies that are described; the problems faced; these are all just around the temporal bend. So let's ask a question here, fellow punkers: Who do you think shaped the near future? Who do you think invented the cyberdecks, AV-4's, cyberware and desktop technologies that make up the Dark Future? Who do you think dumped the industrial sludge that poisoned the environment? Staffed and/or founded the megacorps? Jack out of the game interface of 2020 and look in the shiny reflective surfaces of Tomorrow. You're it, choomba.

Grab my cyberhand and we'll take a trip down the Net towards tomorrow. Let's take a look at the principles of this world we share, where cars fly, computers think and where man's reach

> *So you wanna be a Cyberpunk? Or just look like one?*
>
> **—View From the Edge**

must exceed his cyberarm, or what's an extension module for? Let's ask ourselves what is *Cyberpunk* and what does it mean beyond the rulebook, neh?

CYBERPUNK IS ABOUT THE MAN-MACHINE FUSION

> *I'm not a man/Or a machine./I'm just something in between.*
> —Loverboy;
> "Lovin' Every Minute of It"

T's about the line between Man and his tools blurring so much that you can't tell the difference. You can create artificial eyes, hips, ears, hands, legs, hearts. You can replace body parts with metal ones that may even do the job better than meat; potential immortality through better industrialism. It's about transcending limits. Why drive a car? Why not become a car? Have part of your body take on those machine functions. These are only the most immediate possibilities; we can't even imagine the outer envelope. How we use the man-machine interface is going to be more important than how we achieve it; because the result will determine whether human evolution follows the organic path or the inorganic.

Do we lose something in becoming our tools? Do we gain something? If you take a child crippled at birth and slam his brain into an Alpha class full-body cyborg, is he still a human being? Will people be willing to mutilate themselves to strap on a mechanical extra, even if it is a better body part than the one it replaced? Will this amazing ability be trivialized in the name of fashion? *Cyberpunk* asks us to consider these questions, and to make up our own answers.

CYBERPUNK IS ABOUT HARD CHOICES

> *Replicants didn't have pets. And they didn't have families either.*
> —Blade Runner

I t's about knowing so much about how the human machine works that you have to make really hard choices that formerly only God had to worry about. Now you can keep a human alive long after he's brain dead; so do you pull the plug? You can repair birth defects in the womb; who gets the surgery? What happens when you have access to the entire structure of human genetics? Already we've got gene tags on a half dozen types of birth defect, as well as others on physical characteristics. Now that we're gaining the power to alter ourselves at the genetic level, will we tinker with humanity the way we have with machines? What kind of humans will we build? And will we be right to do it? Now that we can clone people, will we use it to save lives, or build armies of replicant slaves in a real life *Blade Runner*?

Not all choices require a gene splicer and a clone vat. In this future we're creating, we're going to have to answer a lot of other questions. Will advanced computer technology allow us to extend our reach into the realms of virtual reality; and will it be worth coming back? How do we keep society from turning into an armed camp when new weapons are cheap and plentiful; and morality isn't? Can we redesign our exploding technological civilization to encompass the primitive aspects of our past? Or is the answer to reshape Man himself into something that can live within civilization, now that we have the power?

Tough questions. *Cyberpunk* is about those questions. And the choices we make when we answer them. Our new abilities allow us to remake us in any image we want. It allows us to find new ways to be human; or not, as we choose.

CYBERPUNK IS ABOUT EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

B ut it's more than that. It's about how people relate to those technologies. It's about what they do with them. It's all about whether they take those new abilities and run with them, or are rolled over by more powerful, orga-nized groups who grasp those technologies first.

You are on the edge of a revolution that hasn't been seen since the turn of the 18th century. The advent of the Computer Age will be the greatest quantum shift in technologies since steam power. Like the Steam Age two hundred years ago, Mankind will once again be able to extend his grasp beyond his physical limits. The last time, steam power allowed humans to move weights unthinkable by mere animal or human labor. Steam allowed great vehicles to be built that could carry hundreds of people at previously unheard of speeds (did you know that until 1820, no one had travelled faster than the speed of a horse—about 20mph?). But the Steam Age revolution was not a people's revolution. While it allowed Humanity as a whole to do great things, the actual machines to do it; the real power, was concentrated in the hands of the very few who could afford to build the factories, ships and machines. The man in the street was forced to become part of the machine, not control the machine. Meanwhile, the powerful and wealthy new monopolies controlled the means of production and the wealth that went with it.

Sound familiar?

> *She blinded me — with Science!*
> —Thomas Dolby

The Computer Revolution can be (and so far is) a people's revolution. It began as a technocrat's revolution, but the creation of the inexpensive personal computer changed all that. Unlike the power of steam, which required a huge factory and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to harness, the power of the computer can be had for less than a few hundred bucks. What does that mean for society? First of all, it means that an amazing amount of power can now be harnessed by anyone who can afford to buy a personal computer. Or even rent one for a few hours. This power is an incredible leveller, because it means that for the first time both the guy on the street and the megacorp can compete on the same level.

Here's an example. When I started R. Talsorian eight years ago, the main barrier between the largest game company (TSR) and the smallest (RTG) was typesetting and color artwork. Both were expensive and required an enormous amount of specialized knowledge; I know, because at the time, I was a typesetter and graphic artist. Typesetting also required a lot of specialized training and machinery; you couldn't do it yourself, because even a cheap machine cost forty, fifty thousand dollars. Within a year, laserprinting dropped the price of typesetting to a tenth of what it was. Within four years, the price of a color cover dropped to less than a quarter of before. By 1990, there was literally no functional difference between the kind of book that a huge company could produce and a small in-the-garage company could; all you needed was a cheap personal computer, some software, and a service bureau to run the typesetting out on. Which meant an explosion of new game companies could exist, separated from the big guys only by their imagination and their advertising budget. R.Tal currently produces four-color artwork, finished typesetting, complex artwork; even video productions in-house. Our hardware costs probably less than a single old fashioned typesetting unit did eight years ago. We can already get a book printed by submitting the entire thing on disk to the printer; there are even printing presses that just eat your disk and spit the books out the other end.

Sounds neat, you think, but how does it apply to me? Simple; the personal computer can now be applied to all areas of life. CAD-CAM programs can allow desktop engineers to design new machines, houses, even cars; then drive computer-driven lathes and factories to produce these items. Digital recording systems allow recording artists to make new records on CD—just like RCA or Warner Brothers—and high-end desktop color processing and computer-controlled printing will allow covers to be equal to the larger companies as well. Digital video production allows film makers to produce high quality movies complete with special effects in a garage.

What happens when anyone can design a car? Any rocker can produce a record? Any writer can publish a book? Any filmmaker can do a movie? Never before has the ability to take the Industrial Revolution down to the Man on the Street been so possible. It also means that those in power may be willing to do anything to stop us from breaking the stranglehold they've had for the last ten thousand years. The Street finds its own uses for things... What will you use the power of the new Industrial Revolution for? And when The Powers That Be try to take it away from you, how will you defend yourself?

CYBERPUNK IS ABOUT INFORMATION

> *Information is the Ultimate form of power...*
> **—Attributed to Buckminster Fuller**

It's about how information is used and collected. When the world revolves around numbers and lists, the man who controls those lists controls the world. Case in point: how much money do you have? Right now, in your pocket. Maybe a few dollars? But how much money do you have in a checking or savings account? In a payroll account? In the bank? Now, how much money do you have? The answer is: as much as the computer thinks you do. All that money exists as information; binary code. Just like cash money represents tangible goods and services, the web of financial information also represents real things. But it's still only information; change it and you've changed the thing. The cyberpunks of the proto-Net know that right now. They exchange information as though it were money, swapping bits and bytes for other bits and bytes. They break down the walls of information and distribute it, usually for free. The Powers That Be hate that, because it takes money and power away from them and gives it to you.

Make no mistake, information is money (and power). When you get a magazine subscription or a credit card,

information about you is compiled, packaged and sold all over the world. Money is made on the knowledge of what you buy, where you live; how you earn a living. Power is gathered by knowing what you are doing and when you do it. Here's an interesting question to ponder in a cyberpunk way. Why does a government have a right to know how much money you have and where you keep it? Why, they're the government, you think. Now ask yourself what a government really is. It's a bunch of people you hired (with your vote) to make sure the country runs smoothly, right? Why do your employees have a right to snoop through your digital trash? Read your digital mail?

Cyberpunk means thinking about things like the above. It means not assuming, but challenging; taking control of the dataflow and making it work for you. In the Dark Future that's happening right now, you're already part of a vast international information flow that exchanges money, goods, services and social interaction totally divorced from any governmental control. During the Tienanmen Square rebellions in China, the communist government totally missed the fact that faxes describing the true situation were being transmitted all over the world; in fact, they couldn't have stopped them from being sent without crashing the Chinese monetary system's link to the world as well. The dataflow runs both ways; what happens when hackers use their newfound power to uncover corruption and wrongdoing in governments? When thieves use the dataflow to steal? When competing sides of an issue use the dataflow to tell their view of the story?

Recently, while cruising the Internet, I ran across someone selling furniture. I also ran across someone selling cobra venom. One was in New York, another was in Russia. They were both using the hidden information market to trade goods, services and money in a way that heralded the coming of the Information Age. The Net is already here, fellow punkers. What you have to ask yourself now is what you're going to do with it?

CYBERPUNK IS ABOUT REBELLION

It's about refusing to accept the answers handed down by experts. It's about hacking your own programs when the off-the-shelf version won't get you there. It's about challenging the assumptions about what you can and can't do. It's about facing the future and grabbing it by the throat, forcing it to be what you want it to be, not what someone else tells you it should be.

Cyberpunks ask questions. Hard questions. Why does the world have to go to hell? Why aren't the megacorps responsible for what they do? What are we going to do with the new technologies we create? Why the hell should I do what someone else says just because they say so? Why aren't I setting new standards and values for the world I live in?

Beatniks stayed cool. Hippies dropped out. Yuppies sold out. Generation X gave up. But cyberpunks? They take over. They surf the datawave ahead of the pack, check out the newtech and find new ways to use it, challenge Authority and beat it with its own weapons. Cyberpunks know that Techno-Feudalism is the coming thing: if you're not mastering the future, you're going to be a techno-vassal slaving away for a faceless techno-lord, or worse, a techno-peasant tied to the digital landscape. If there's a future coming, they plan to be there in the vanguard, mastering its new skills and making it their own. As a cyberpunk, your job is to hit the future head on and beat it, not cower in a corner longing for the Good Old Days. As far as you're concerned, it won't get any better till you make it better.
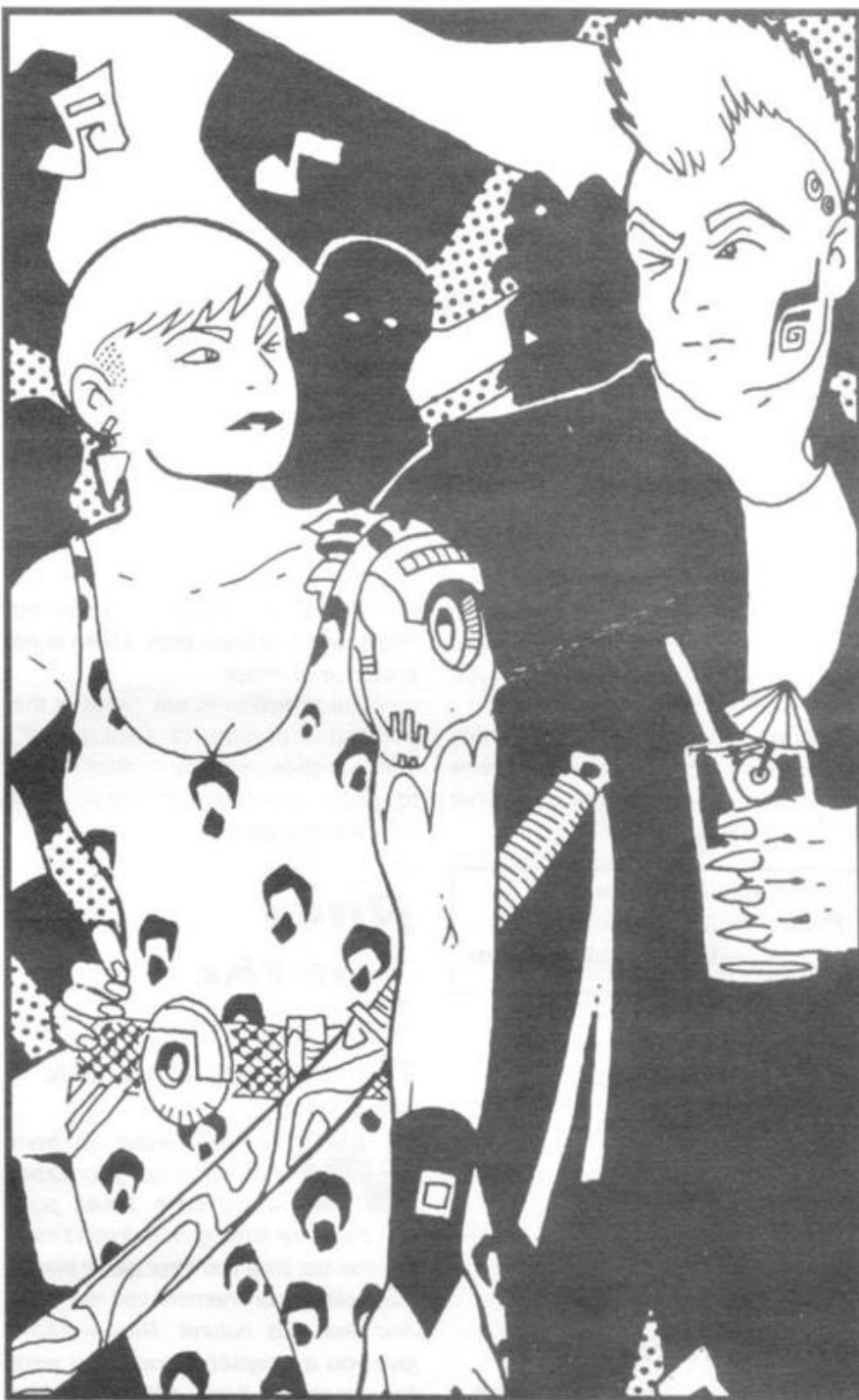
AND LASTLY, CYBERPUNK IS A GAME

When I wrote the first *Cyberpunk* game years ago, I didn't suspect it would evolve into a multileveled science fiction epic that would be shared by tens of thousands of people around the world. But what I did see was a future; a future not quite here yet, where Humanity and Technology would collide and create something new. It was a dark vision, because any time you enter an unknown realm, the road ahead is dark. But I figured we were fated to be going there one way or the other, so why not try to get a sense of what it would be like? Why not illuminate the pits and the traps

ahead, so we could work them out before they were on us like an icy spot on the highway at night?

In the martial arts, a *kata* is a series of moves, almost a dance routine, designed to move through all the steps of an actual attack or defense. Roleplaying is like that, too; it allows you to work out how you'll deal with a situation before it arrives (if ever). It tests your understanding of what is going on around you, and it allows you to make decisions, check reactions, and know yourself within the safe confines of your imagination.

Think of this game as a *kata*. For the Dark Future; a future you may not even want to have. If you want to change it, this is your chance to practice how you'll do it. If you want to be part of it, this'll give you some idea of what it will be like, and whether you think you'll be ready.

Look again into those shiny reflective surfaces. See yourself? Now look back and you tell me what *Cyberpunk* is...

Practice, Practice, Practice...
—Universal wisdom

CRAIG SHEELEY—

REVOLUTION? WHAT REVOLUTION?

(A DISSENTING VIEW)

"There's a lot of talk here about a 'cyberpunk revolution.' What fraggin' revolution? I don't see no flags wavin'. I don't hear no trumpets blowin'. What I do see is a dog-eat-dog world where gettin' ahead equals survival. What I hear is the cash-register bell of the almighty eurodollar.

"So don't give me no GIGO about a 'revolution.' I'll let the rockers deal with inciting riots and such. Sure, I've got my own ethics. I don't do what

makes me dirty. An' I'll be happy to frag a corp that's busy fraggin' what's left of the world. I might even do it for free, if they start movin' my way. But don't try to incite me to revolt. There's no percentage in it." (Anonymous edgerunner, 2022)

What is the 'Cyberpunk Revolution?' The only revolution in evidence is a technical revolution. Sociologically speaking, the era of *Cyberpunk* is a state of flux, a period of technological madness where the world is changing so fast that society can't keep up. In time, society will stabilize, and the sense of disorder and anarchy will subside.

As for a 'Cyberpunk Revolution', the very term revolution would seem to indicate a concerted, organized effort, and a defined goal. There is no evidence of either.

The question is not "what is the political message of *Cyberpunk*?" The question is "why bother trying to send a political message in a role-playing game?"

Ross "SPYKE" WINN—

THE DAYS SEEM TO RUN TOGETHER...

When you wake up from your short rest your Other is still there. Lover, partner, friend, or hired gun; it doesn't matter. The last time you slept alone was in that solitary confinement cell last year. And that was natural. They wouldn't give you a sleepset; thought you were too dangerous. It was a lousy rest. You kept starting awake every few minutes. Waiting for the Bulls to come in and kick you around a while. They even opened the door a few times, just to mess with your head.

As your Other hands you the gun, puts on their 'trodes and sleeps the sleep of expedience, you wander off to wash and eat. You don't wander far, the apartment is about three meters square. It's been this way for as long as

you remember. Then you realize you don't remember very far back.

It's not that time moves slowly, not at all. You do business twenty-two hours a day. With drugs, thirty-six. Always working to stay off the street, and out of the bodybank. Things change every day and you must change with them. One step ahead of the competition.

As you depilate and wash, you watch Vid and listen to some new music off the Sats. Some kids from Boston ranting about unsafe research; so you call your man in Beantown and tell him to stock up on pharmaceuticals.

INFORMATION IS A TSUNAMI WAVE AND YOU'RE TRYING TO SURF...

There is a constant din in your world. At least three different kinds of information assail you at any moment. Talking on the phone, reading a scream, and watching Vid; all while drinking in a local bar. You are driven insane by silence, because things are happening, and you don't know it.

Unless you're a real mover, like the president of a Regional Corporation, you are never really alone. The omnipresent crush of the crowds around you is almost unnoticed. You feel uncomfortable in a crowd of less than ten. Unless you're in one of those tragically hip clubs that no one knows about yet.

When you finish your daily ritual the two of you enter out into the world. Ready to fight for another day, ready to take on the world. Today will be different.

Something will happen today. You aren't sure what it is, but it will change your life. You don't even know it, but today you will leave the familiar behind. You will fight for change. You will be a Revolutionary.

WHAT CHANGES CAN THE AVERAGE EDGERUNNER EFFECT IN HIS WORLD?

The idea behind the *Cyberpunk 2020* game is revolution. Other games usually revolve around survival, in *Cyberpunk*, survival is secondary. What is important

is accomplishing something. To keep from being just another statistic. It is the concept of empowerment. The ability of a person to make a difference in their world. Whether it's the small world of a burnt-out neighborhood, or a Corporation that controls the assets of a Nation. That is your world, and that world is where you must make a difference.

THE KEY

"This is a world of opportunity, a world where a person can make their own way. We can change the world, right now!

"There is a key to all this. The key is information. In 2020 information is the key to everything. With the right information anything is possible. You could control the very existence of the human race with the right collection of facts. This is the reality, right now.

"The next generation will have a greater ability to use this knowledge. They will not grow up in a world of revolution and change. Theirs will be more stable, more useful, more successful. Because they will not have to re-learn what we have learned, fight the battles we have fought, and survived the losses we have survived. We make our world better for the next generation. That is the reason we fight, right now!"

—Rocker Jack Maxximum, s.j. at the 25th Anniversary of the Amnesty Incident. March 12, 2023. Approximately six hours before his assassination by Biotechnica forces.

Jack Maxximum was wrong. The changes that were taking place in society were not yet finished. What he and his generation could not see were the Carbon Plague, the ISA takeover, any of it. Most saw the Cyberpunk Revolution as something that would end. Not, like so much technology, simply be superseded.

Jack Maxximum was also right. Knowledge is the key. There is so much information, and it has such tangible power, that with it a man can control the world.

NO BUSHI, NO BU

### WITHOUT HONOR, THE EDGERUNNER ECONOMY COLLAPSES

The existence of this gray economy is predicated on several different ideas. The most all-encompassing is a hatred of "The Man." All Edgerunners, even those who are actually part of the power structure, have a deep seated distrust and (sometimes) hatred of "The Powers That Be". These are the people that took your privacy, your wife, your children, or your mind, and just did with it what they wanted. Casual violence, like an elephant stepping on an anthill. This enemy has no real face, it is just there.

Some may feel that this attitude would not work in situations of powerful Corporate characters, Cops, or Politicos. This is a common misconception. Unless you are the one who is on top of the world there is always a "Man" out there for you to hate. Cops band together against corrupt city government. Corporates ally against a VP that is trying to get them killed (so he gets all the credit). State Governors form blocs to flaunt their disdain for Federal executive power. It is all based on the outlook of the people involved.

These Gangs, Syndicates, Face Banks, and Edgerunners all share a common enemy in "The Man". If one should sell out another, then all the contacts dry up and the turncoat is usually found in a very public place, Dead!

THE MOVER

Living on the run is the only way that you know how to live. You remember a time when things weren't quite so hectic. As a small time mover in the big city you had your life all planned out. You thought that the one big score was just around the corner. You were gonna' be out of the business in two years, tops. Needless to say, things haven't really gone according to schedule.
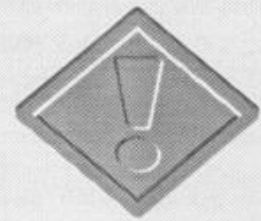
Those two years were like a single adrenaline rush. Trying to really make it you've bankrupted yourself twice. If it weren't for the few friends that you do have, you wouldn't have been able to bounce back. The "boys in black" are on your ass again this week. They think you had something to do with that bombing last week. There are three other companies gunning for you as well; but they seem to be busy doing other things right now.

You're setting up another big one again this week. If no one gets scared, or turns coat, then this may be the one. You hope so; if not, someday you're gonna' slip up, and then you're history.

THE GRIND

Most Edgerunners are caught up in the grind. They live day to day, hand to mouth, just trying to stay alive. The Edgerunners and Movers want a future, something more; but have neither the ability, nor the resources to make it by themselves.

EDGERUNNER ECOLOGY

There is a system that defines the shadow-economy in 2020. Edgerunners are not present simply for their own edification. They are a wanted and needed resource.

THE RONIN IDEAL

The Government needs the shadow economy. They supply valuable cash-flow in the near-bankrupt future. Edgerunners are, to a great extent, the last of the middle class. But the Government is not alone. The Corporations also need the shadow economy. Edgerunners provide important goods and services that are not available elsewhere. As the Ronin and Ninja were a real and necessary element in Shogunate-Era Japan, the Ronin Ideal is also necessary in 2020 America.

A NECESSARY EVIL

There are people who will never fit in the Corporate-Government power structure. They lack, or go without, some key element that allows them to remain in a Corporate family. They want their

freedom. The Corporations, especially as they accrue the powers that were once reserved for Nations, need deniable assets. They need the same covert powers that governments have with freelance intel agents, and "men with no names." So the Corporations tolerate, and to some degree actually support, the shadow economy. They realize that some of their covert elements need supplies, so they look the other way if something occasionally "falls off a truck." At the same time they are ever-watchful of these people. They realize that by operating outside the chain of command these people can accrue great power, and this power can be used for change.

STEPPING INTO THE LIGHT

The power that the Edge-runners of the world can amass is sometimes awesome. If something happens that galvanizes the Edgerunners against the system, they can be very disruptive. The most common of these events is the realization that things are not as they should be. When an Edgerunner has a revelation like this it is a significant event. Usually it involves the death of a teammate, or false imprisonment. It is the moment that the player-character realizes that the future is worth more than money, more than fame. It is the moment they become a Revolutionary. It is stepping into the light.

THE BASIC PREMISE OF 2020 AMERICA IS FLAWED

America, and the whole world, is truly a troubled place in 2020. The whole of society is winding toward entropy. People die every day, simply because the system is both too complicated, too alien, and too stagnant. After the Collapse there was so much chaos that drastic measures had to be taken, just to preserve the corpse that was America. A few well-meaning soldier-statesmen (men and women) decided that we required a simpler form of Govern-ment, a streamlined criminal justice system, and a federal govern-

ment (at least for defense). These changes were not discussed, approved, or voted upon by the citizenry. To make things even worse, powerful voices, in the form of Multinationals, had a disproportionate say in how things worked. For all the good things that they did, the "New America" was no longer a government of, by, or for the people. Instead, there are only two kinds of people in 2020—those who have the power, and therefore control things; or those who have nothing, and can gain nothing by either the fall or continuation of the "False America."

LAW MUST COME FROM INSIDE THE SOCIETY, NOT FORCED UPON IT

In 2020 America the system has failed. There is no way to remove that system because the removal would cause another Collapse that the Global Economy probably wouldn't survive.

In any society the law must come from within the society. In 2020 America almost no changes come within society. They are forced upon it by singular powers that are interested in only forwarding their own goals. Without any kind of consensus, or common goals of any kind, the system is breaking down.

What many do not understand is that this is a huge interlocking structure. It changes very slowly, and each change must be insignificant by itself. Slowly these changes could carve a new face in America. The cyberpunks cannot wait that long.

The cyberpunks are a younger group on the average. Most were born very close to The Collapse. They have become accustomed to change on a daily basis. Not just small changes either. *Home Of The Brave* explained part of this in the evolution of Nomad society.

At the beginning of Nomad society there was a strong impetus for these people to bond and work together. They simply had no choice because without cooperation, they were absolutely dead, just like all the others that did not, or would not, cooperate.

These groups became powerful for two reasons: One, they were great in number. Any mob of people moving toward a common goal (especially with all the assets that the Nomad community had) will prevail if it is large enough. Two, the growing Corporate infrastructure needed a large group of people, who were skilled, to rebuild the shattered economy and cities of America. Tertiary economic realities defined that the people who took this job had to be outside the Federal (read: Military) structure. No group of Corporations (especially in their damaged state) had the resources to support both the wages, and the infrastructure necessary for the workers.

The Nomads were perfect. They required no infrastructure (they had already developed their own), or excessive wages. The Military and State Governments were complacent because though they funded the reconstruction by sheer force of will, the Corp-orations were not (then) interested in running the American Government in general.

By 2020 three things have changed. First, the Federal Government has realized that its Corp-orate representation is grossly overpowered. They are no longer complacent to lose the tax-income from these people, and at the same time lose power in Government. They generally believe that by reintegrating Nomads and other Zeroes they can fund a resistance to Corporate dominance. Second, The rebuilding of America is almost totally finished. Though it in almost no way resembles the America it has replaced, there is a sound and set America in 2020.

Finally, economic pressures are forcing the Nomads into three groups. One wants to integrate back into American society. They are tired of being trodden upon and exploited. Two, some groups are seeking similar work in other parts of the Americas, and the world. Last are a smaller group who believe there is a conscious effort to drive the Nomads out of America. These people are proud of their Nomad society, and will do anything to keep it. Including War.
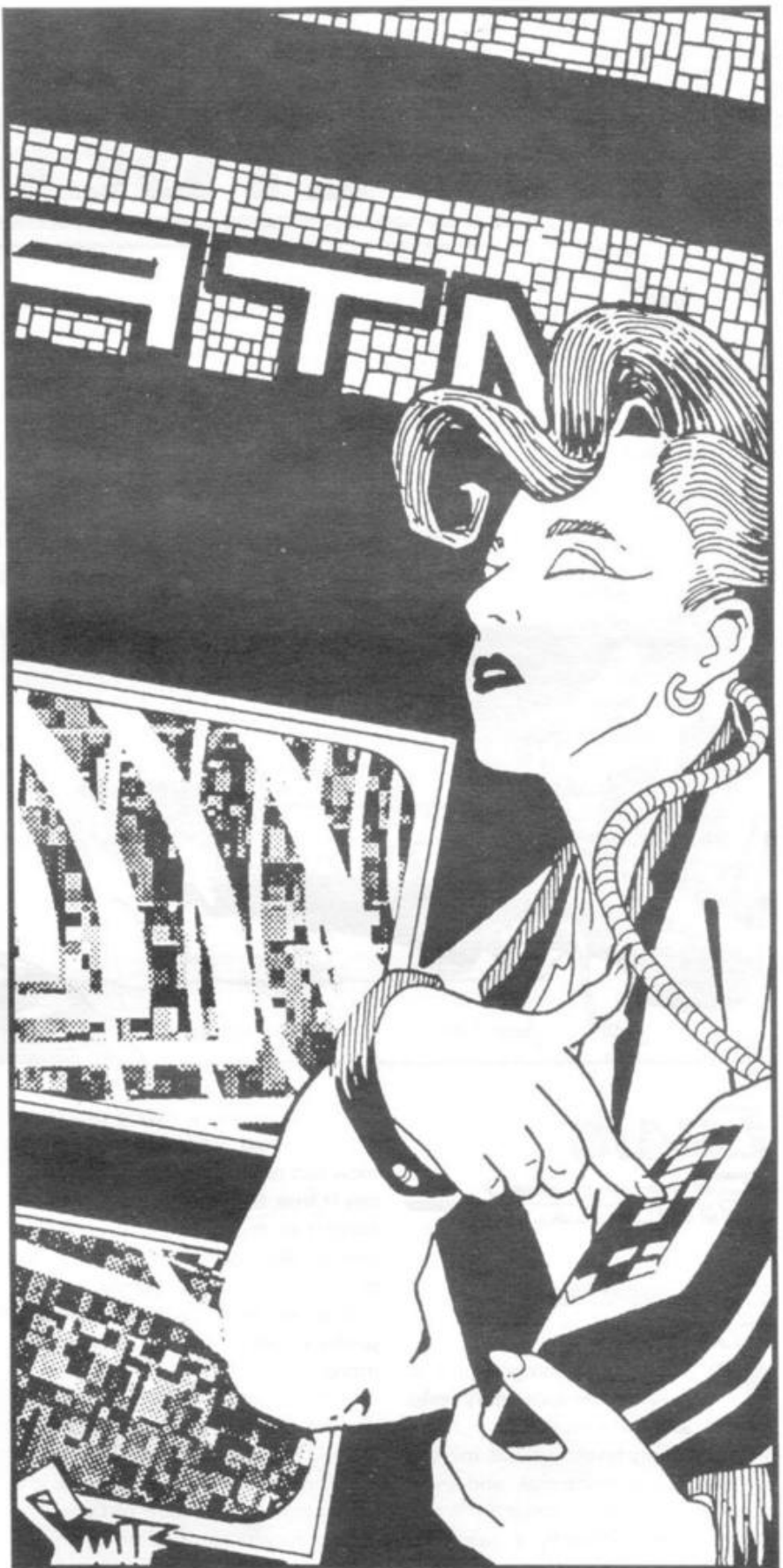
RUNNING COMBAT IN CYBERPUNK

CRAIG SHEELEY—

CYBERPUNK COMBAT

Conflict is an integral part of every adventure story ever told or visualized. It takes place on many levels: verbal, mental, emotional, environmental, and even internal ("man versus himself"). When conflict turns physical, it becomes combat.

An old oriental saying proclaims that the man who strikes the first blow has run out of arguments. While this is true, it is also true that taking a conflict to the physical level is fast, emotionally satisfying to the more primitive side of the human psyche, and usually final. Do it right, and that problem won't be a problem any more.

People in the *Cyberpunk* universe are not usually trained or disciplined to view negotiation as the first choice for resolving conflicts. *Cyberpunk* is a technological nightmare of Darwinian selection, with survival going to the most successful—in this case being

those people who are able to utilize what power they have to defeat their opponents.

In other words, there are times when you run into people who are going to actively oppose your course of action, and these people are also likely to choose combat as their option of action.

For the *Cyberpunk* referee, combat can be a handy tool for guiding player decisions, for livening up the action, or for giving the players a chance to use all those expensive new killing toys that they just acquired. More on this point later (see Combat and the Plot).

COMBAT ACTION

There are two extremes of running combat: cinematic and realistic. Most referees probably prefer a style that is a blend of both extremes (somewhere in the middle ground).

Cinematic combat is fast and colorful; it attempts to follow the action from the point of view of the heroes and other important characters. NPCs are important only as they interact with or threaten the main characters (both player-characters and important NPCs). In cinematic combat, positions and placements are often faked and 'guesstimated,' ammunition supplies matter only as they affect the plot and action, opponents are either in perfect shape, wounded but still fighting, or down for the count; combatant actions are broad and fast-paced, without niggling attention to little details ("I'm going to jump through the car window as it speeds past, firing at the tires as I fly through the air"). The referee bears the burden of maintaining all the actions, activities, positions, and events in some semblance of order.

One of the benefits of cinematic combat is a great amount of player-character freedom of action, encouraging player inventiveness and role-play (think Errol Flynn, Indiana Jones, Rambo). The players don't need to know the details of the system; that's the referee's job. The players can concentrate on being heroes instead of worrying about weapons overheating, or counting meters to see if their MA is big enough to make that cover—the referee might allow a die roll against MA to make it, simulating that all-out push.

The drawback is, of course, a lack of detail and realism, one of the things that attracts a lot of referees to *Cyberpunk 2020* in the first place. Also, the referee bears the entire brunt of record-keeping and tracking in cinematic combats, as well as having to interpret the rules for tricky player actions.

Realistic combat is the other extreme. Here, every player has to have a good grasp of the rules. Maps, figures, and other positioning tools are necessary, with a measuring grid or system to plot movement exactly. Every combatant has to have rigid records detailing condition, ammunition, weaponry, and capabilities. Initiative and sequencing is by-the-book,

ruled by relative speeds and action capability. Likewise, every rule is in force; no fudging (ideally), and the referee is the arbiter of all rules uncertainties.

The advantage of stern realism is an easing of the referee's task, turning him into a true referee rather than a gamemaster (a gamemaster takes care of all details; a referee merely arbitrates rules disputes). It also puts paid to people whining about bad die rolls ruling their lives, or about the referee's Difficulty levels being too high—the players know the score when they go in.

The disadvantage of pure realism is that it turns the game into a wargame, stifling the players' urge to act heroically. Rather than pushing their luck, players stick to their known capabilities. To be blunt, the realistic approach isn't as much fun. Plus, taking the time for each combatant's move, actions, and combat results slows down play horribly, which is often not a good thing for the plot line.

GRACE UNDER FIRE

Here is an optional rule for those referees who wish to accurately portray the way people react in combat. The moment that "fight or flight" reflex hits, most people experience a sudden drop in rational thought activity. They're not trained to keep their heads under fire; a good part of the average soldier's combat training is used indoctrinating him in routines that will be instinctive in a combat situation, so he doesn't have to think, just react according to cue.

During combat, the referee should evaluate each action that a character (PC or NPC) wants to do. The referee has to do this anyway to fit the action into the overall combat, but in addition, the referee has to decide whether the proposed action is simple enough for the character to do it without having to think too much. Simple examples are: Shoot at someone, duck for cover, run, attack, reload, etc. More complex actions, requiring more complex thought, require that the character ignore the stress and keep his head clear.

Simulate this with a COOL+1D10 roll, Difficulty 15+. If the character succeeds, he is free to perform the proposed complex action. If the character fails, he

has to do something simple that still fits the situation instead.

This roll can also be used for morale. When a character is hit and wounded, when a character is trapped or outnumbered (or out-gunned), or when a vehicle a character is in is damaged, a COOL+1D10 roll of Difficulty 15+ (or more, depending on the situation) is necessary to see if the character continues to fight. If failed, the character will try to seek cover, or even flee if the roll is fumbled. In cases where regimented teams are involved, the team leader's **Leadership** skill can be added to each member's roll.

Finally, this roll can be used to figure out when a player should be given combat advice that his character would logically know, but that the player might not know. For instance, not everybody knows that the correct weapon for door-to-door combat is the hand grenade ("when in doubt, grenade it out"). Someone with **Tactics** knows this, but a character with a high **Combat Sense** score also should have learned this somewhere...

COMBAT AND THE PLOT

As stated earlier, there are three ways to make combat useful to the plot line. It can be used to liven up the action, give the players a chance to use their new toys, or serve to guide player decisions.

Sometimes the pace of a game just lags. The players can't decide what to do, or they are at an impasse without a clue, or they might even decide to head off into left field on a wild idea of their own, leaving the referee's plot line behind! In this case, combat can be used as a tool to pick up the pace a bit—there's nothing like a threat to make people wake up and pay attention. It's a good idea to have a handy enemy in reserve, waiting for a chance to pounce at a dull moment. Just the suspicion that there's a fight waiting in the wings will help keep your players on their toes.

Cyberpunk is a game chock-full of newer and more novel ways to destroy physical objects. If your player-characters have gone out of their way to acquire some of these bang-bangs, then it's pure

cruelty to deny them a chance to play. The targets, er, opponents for this can range from simple juve-gangers ("take that, ya brats!") to other expendable gang types that no-one will ever miss, to targets whose extinction will help move the plot. Say someone's just nicked an EMG rail-gun. He takes a shot at the first heavy vehicle he sees, which just happens to be an unmarked Arasaka patrol car. Naturally, Arasaka is not going to be universally pleased at the idea of some skinwaste fragging one of their cars... Enter Plot Point #NN, Arasaka Interference. It's just a matter of deciding who wanders into the cross-hairs.

Considering the nature of society in *Cyberpunk*, random combat events certainly have their place. After all, if every combat is in actuality a plot point, the players will catch on pretty quick and start reacting uncharacteristically. But for the most part, a combat sequence is a good place for a couple of plot points. Given that the best way to get someone's attention (and arouse his ire) is to threaten life and limb, a quick combat sequence makes a good adventure hook (what the heck, it works in the movies).

But combat is a good way to present plot points. There are always questions about every combat. Who attacked us? Were they using something they logically shouldn't have been (like a street-gang with restricted weapons, for instance)? How did they go about the attack; did they just shoo us out of an area, were they content to pin us down until they could leave, did they make a big deal out of trying to hunt us all down? And the big question that all these are leading up to: Why did they attack us?

When planning one of these plot-point attacks, put yourself in the player-characters' combat boots. Consider from their point of view: what's likely to catch their attention? What obvious point are they going to notice about the conflict? What are they likely to do in a given situation? And what are they going to read into the situation?

Here's an example: I wanted to give some new *Cyberpunk* players an introduction to Night City, the combat system, and the *Cyberpunk* atmosphere. They were all dirt poor, with barely enough weapons and armor to survive, so I stuck them in the middle of a situation where the Maelstrom gang blocked off several roads near the stadium while the crowd was letting out from a soccer game. The gang members started looting the cars in the resulting traffic jam. The players, experienced role-players all, decided that their characters were simply going to watch with bored urban aplomb, not wanting to mess with a heavy-duty firefight. So I improvised a professional extraction (using powered armor and a legged vehicle) right before their eyes, setting them up for the next play session with a number of questions to pique their interest. The purpose of the combat turned into a plot-starter; only two PCs got into the combat at all. Even as onlookers, they saw several things that got them thinking. (Why did Arasaka-marked suits participate in an extraction of an Arasaka exec? Why did Maelstrom just happen to block that street at that time? Who was piloting the suits and walker; they disappeared into the bay, and one of the suits did a triple somersault dive on the way in.) None of them got really hurt, and the simple combat served to introduce the plot, familiarize them with the background, and hit them with a healthy dose of atmosphere (the atmosphere doesn't get any thicker than flying lead!). And I taught them a healthy dose of respect for their own firepower (when one of them blew a Maelstromer in half with a sawed-off shotgun) and the Powers That Be (another unlucky ganger got cut in half by an ACPA-wielded katana).

Making it smooth: The real task is to make combat a part of the plot line, turning it into a tool to maintain the flow of the story instead of letting it become a stumbling block. Improperly managed, a combat sequence can bring the story line to a screeching halt while taking up time to fight.

The quicker the combat sequence, the better it is for the flow of play. There are exceptions to this rule, such as the climactic battle scene with the bad guys, but few genres concentrate story lines on combat for combat's sake (comic books and superhero games notwithstanding).

How to make a combat sequence quicker? Unfortunately for those enthralled with pure realism, the cinematic style works best. If you want to keep things running fast, stage a lop-sided combat—throw far too few or far too many opponents at your heroes. Having to fight only a few opponents doesn't require that most *Cyberpunk* groups even break stride, but does provide an opportunity to present clues, or at least point out an important fact or two to the PCs (such as the fact that they are doing something that someone else doesn't like). Facing a horde of overpowering foes usually serves to motivate PC groups to either start talking or running real fast, hopefully in a direction that tallies with the referee's plot developments. This is only a sample of the ways in which combat can be used to further the plot.

COMBAT MADE EASIER

As any referee knows, running a combat sequence is the hardest task a referee has to deal with in any role-playing situation. The referee has to keep track of the positions, conditions, motives, and actions of everyone involved in the battle—this is in addition to keeping track of details like ammunition and armor reduction! Here are some pointers and suggestions that might help to ease the burden a little:

SIMPLE RECORDS

One of the oldest tricks in the book is to have all your ducks lined up in a row—have all the NPCs laid out in simplified fashion on a single sheet of paper. The NPC records page in the *Cyberpunk 2020* book are nice, but they have just too much information (and take up too much space) for good combat usefulness.

The way I do it is to line up the basics on each combatant. Even if I have to call a time out in the game for a few moments while I generate some basic, it's well worth the wait, because things run so much more smoothly. These basics are the following: REF (modified for armor EV), BODY, MA, Armor SP and type (soft, hard), and the requisite skills. The people at Atlas Games came up with a really good idea

on how to list skills, adding up the skill, the requisite stat, and all weapon modifiers into one number (they also add up Initiative stats). The skills to note are Notice/Awareness (including **Combat Sense**), Brawling, Dodge & Escape, Fencing, Handgun, Heavy Weapons, Martial Art, Melee, **Rifle**, and Sub-Machinegun. For instance, a 'punk wearing EV -2 armor, with REF 8, **Rifle** 4, smart-goggles, and a smart-rifle with a WA of +1 would end up with a **Rifle** 13 skill noted.

(One way of generating a quick adversary? Have a couple of pages of pre-generated gangers/security guards/thugs ready before the adventure, and just use 'em up in order, as much as you need.)

The final stat to keep track of is the wound track; note blunt trauma hits with check-marks and wounding hits with x marks. (For more on blunt trauma, see below).

THE ADVERSARY

Some referees might consider an adversary player! This is a reliable (and ideally impartial) player whose job it is to play the other side, the side up against the player-characters. This does make the referee's job easier, because he doesn't have to keep track of all the enemies. In addition, it usually puts some smarts into the NPCs, because the adversary will use smarter and meaner tactics than the referee can get away with (unless the referee wants to be known as a "killer ref").

The problem with this is, of course, that the adversary player might use the omniscience of the referee's position to give his side too much of an edge. Unless the referee has the ability to isolate the adversary from the other players (in another room where he can't hear the other players), then the referee has make sure that the adversary doesn't have his combatants acting on information that they can't possibly have.

MAKING IT GRAPHIC

A simple map can do wonders for cutting down on the problem of keeping track of the combat. Two maps can do even more; the player-characters note their movements on one map, and the referee notes the

movements of their opponents on another map, comparing positions to determine when the combatants will be able to spot one another (that's why it's important to note that **Notice/Awareness** skill!). In battles where the locations of the respective forces are important, this is a must. In more fluid, unorganized scenes (like the Maelstrom streetfight described above), a simple description and more random encounters will do.

For those really interested in graphics, there are plenty of futuristic miniature figures available (the Grenadier *Cyberpunk* and *Future Warriors* lines, Ral Partha's *Shadowrun* line, and even Heartbreaker and Citadel figures). Just using some painted minis adds a lot to a good battle scene, and helps keep track of positioning on a table-top map. You can even dispense with the map and simulate buildings (really whacked-out people can scratch-build city-scapes, like the one at the R. Talsorian booth at GenCon '93. It was neat!), using rulers to scale the conflict (normal miniatures scale is about 2 meters to the inch). Vehicles can be added using miniature cars, model tanks and helicopters, AV's and specialty vehicles (Grenadier makes an entire line of dark future epoxy vehicles, including an AV!), and powered armor (RAFM *Mekton* minis make stunning ACPA suits).

HIGH NOON SHOOTOUT

Finally, if a system doesn't work, change it (the gamemaster's motto). A lot of people have found that the basic *Friday Night Fire Fight* combat system tends to be a bit on the slow side, with all that dice rolling, having to track each bullet and note armor deterioration. In addition, the system doesn't directly account for little matters like blunt trauma (your armor might stop that bullet from putting a hole in you, but it still doesn't feel good) and crippling injuries. Finally, when you introduce heavy variables like heavy SP/SDP Powered Armor suits, the system doesn't work too well, taking all day to hurt a weak suit (the alternative system in *Maximum Metal*, which treats PA suits like vehicles, kills them too swiftly).

The answer, of course, is to make up a new, faster, combat system. Such a system was debuted in *CyberGeneration*, developed from various suggested and proposed combat systems to improve on *Friday Night Fire Fight*. The result is "Saturday Nite Scuffle," a fast-paced, cinematic set of rules.

After playing with this variant at GenCon, I decided that the two systems could be merged to allow using the damage track from F*NFF* and the fast pace and damage results from SNS, adapting some of the *FNFF* modifiers, and ending up with "High Noon Shootout." This new system is detailed in the Rules Appendix, page 102.

SNEAKY FACTS ABOUT COMBAT

There is no such thing as a 'fair fight.' Whenever there is armed conflict, it is either on your terms, or on the enemy's terms. Someone always has an advantage, even if that advantage is minuscule.

It's amazing how many punks don't seem to realize this. It seems that for every canny fighter, analyzing his target, the surroundings, and the situation, looking for an opening and ready to withdraw if the battle isn't to his liking, there are dozens of brazen idiots playing macho western gunslinger. These idiots attempt to engineer 'fair fights' of the 'shootout at high noon' variety, where they systematically eliminate every advantage that they might have over a vastly superior opponent... Don't call someone out unless you're certain that you're a lot better than he is. Modern medical techniques can't cure a bullet between the eyes.

The basic *Friday Night Fire Fight* section of *Cyberpunk 2020* is filled with sidebars full of practical advice. The Ambush section is near the beginning of the chapter for a reason: ambushes are the best way to fight. Don't allow the enemy to fight back; it's much safer than when he does. It's best if he never knows what hit him, or how many times. Morgan Blackhand's quips on automatic weapons use and on the advisability of not advertising your capabilities (when he talks about carrying assault weapons,

page 50) are both valuable lessons. And the sidebars on "Do Unto Others, Then Split" are excellent examples of good 'punk combat thinking.

SUCCESSFUL COMBAT TECHNIQUES

In order to set this section in context, here is the general objective of all combat: to remove an enemy by force without sustaining unacceptable casualties. 'To remove an enemy' may range from killing the opponent to merely encouraging him to leave the area, and may even mean just keeping the enemy from returning fire!

There are several ways to do this, all of them very basic combat maneuvers. The correct tactic for a given situation depends upon the goal of the combat.

BOUNDING OVERWATCH

This is one othe most basic land combat tactics in use today. The principle splits a unit into two equal teams. While the first team provides cover fire to nullify the enemy, the second team moves forward to positions where they can wait and provide cover fire to allow the first team to advance. The entire unit advances in leapfrog bounds. Bounding overwatch is most useful when you need to advance into enemy fire; there's no safer way to advance while under fire. And remember, it's great in stairwells.

CONCENTRATED FIRE

The Germans called this the 'nailing' technique. An attack tactic, the theory is to spread out enough forces to occupy the bulk of the enemy, then concentrate all other available firepower on a single point of the enemy's defenses, battering it until it gives way. After the defenses collapse, the attackers advance through the available gap. Although this was designed for use by entire platoons and companies, it can be used by smaller forces (i.e., gangs and player-characters) as well. For example, a small assault group has to get inside a perimeter held by Arasaka security forces. Leaving a few people to run around the perimeter, firing to keep the vast majority of the security forces busy, the rest of the assault group sets up outside a single part of the security perimeter. This concentrated assault force directs all their firepower at the chosen point; hopefully, the applied firepower wounds, kills, or suppresses all of the defenders, leaving a breach in the defenses that the assault force can exploit.

Another use of concentrated firepower is as a way of taking out (or at least suppressing) your most powerful opponent. It's a good idea to risk a couple of turns of fire from less powerful opponents in order to silence a more powerful opponent by ganging up on it. Given a choice between taking fire from an Arasaka force armed with shotguns and taking fire from a lesser force armed with shotguns and a grenade launcher, I'll chose the first option. So identify the largest threats and deal with them swiftly.

L-SHAPED AMBUSH

To use this tried-and-true tactic you need at least two automatic weapons capable of sustained fire. The formation is shaped like the letter "L," with one weapon at the meeting point of the long and short strokes, and one at the far tip of the short stroke. Light troops are strung out along the long stroke; they harass the enemy as he moves down the long stroke (which is positioned in cover, flanking the enemy's advance), driving the enemy towards the short stroke. When the enemy is between the two automatic weapons, both open up, strafing the enemy (the area covered by these weapons is properly known as a "killing zone"), while the harassing troops close in (from a safe distance) and pepper the enemy from the rear. This is a classic murder tactic, and very hard to fight.

Defensive techniques rely on keeping the enemy from using his strength effectively. The offensive idea of concentrating fire on the most deadly threats works here, too, but it is the only offensive tactic which really has its place in defense. Once the defense is successful, it may be converted to an offensive counterattack if the situation calls for it.

PERIMETER DEFENSES

In an offensive situation, only active forces can participate. In a defensive situation, prepared, static defenses can be used. These include such goodies as mines, traps, perimeter sensors, and seeking defenses (robotic guns, etc.). Not much needs to be said about the wisdom or methods of setting perimeter defenses, but a few words of advice are appropriate.

(1) Always make sure you know where your defenses are! Or at least have defenses that can tell you from the enemy. Many men have died by blundering into their own traps.

(2) Use your traps and mines to channel the enemy into fire zones. Troops and vehicles usually detour around obvious minefields—or something that they think is a minefield—instead of going through the dangerous undertaking of clearing the way. Plant your traps where you don't want the enemy to be.

(3) Don't rely too heavily on unmanned defenses. If you can get through it safely, so can the enemy.

FIRE CORRIDORS & GRAZING FIRE

A fire corridor is another area-denial tool. Plot an area where the enemy can advance, then set up a machinegun to cover it with sweeping fire (any automatic weapon will do). That way you don't have to aim when the enemy starts moving through it, you just hold down the trigger and sweep. Emplaced machineguns with plenty of ammunition and high dependability can be fired even when there's no enemy there, in order to discourage the enemy from even trying to advance along the corridor. (Rules: this Ambush grants not +5 to Attack rolls, but +10 to Initiative.)

Grazing fire is where you set the machinegun at about knee level and fire; this way, you usually hit not-so-well-armored legs. Grazing fire goes perfectly with fire corridor doctrine. (In the rules, this tactic is considered a use of Suppressive Fire which only hits legs.)

So you don't have an emplaced defense? Fire corridors are still a legitimate tactic, even in impromptu settings! If the enemy is too strong and you want to deny his advance, fall back into a position where you can channel an enemy advance through a narrow point, and bingo! you have a fire corridor.

SNIPERS

Set your most accurate marksman with the best long-range weapon into a sniper position. Whenever possible, go after the enemy's most potent weapon; always look for positions that the enemy could use to his advantage, and try to deny these to him through sniper fire. Be warned—snipers die a lot! Once the enemy detects them, a lot of resources tend to be allotted to removing them ("...the Army won't think twice about blasting a building to rubble just to get one sniper." Home Of The Brave, page 66). A sniper is a delaying and/or area-denial tactic, and like most such defenses, can be removed.

GAS

In rural environments, gas has to be provided in such quantity that it's beyond the scope of the game. In an urban environment, gas is very handy. It makes an excellent area-denial tool, and very few people are equipped with gas masks or nose filters, or, in the case of corrosives, full chemical gear. Furthermore, many wet gasses also contain UV-fluorescent chemicals to mark people exposed to gas for later identification. Please note that nearly every security corporation knows how to use gas, and would rather use it than bullets (less collateral damage).

WIRE TRAPS

The BOM wire obstacle (*Maximum Metal*, page 74) is a good item for establishing emergency defenses. Simply toss one down (at a safe distance!) and block a street, a corridor, or alleyway. Air-dropped concertina wire achieves the same effect.

RECON BY FIRE

This is the most dubious tactic in military use, even more risky than Recon in Force. Typically used by militaries who are not worried about who they might be shooting, recon by fire is the practice of shooting positions that might be occupied by enemy troops. ("Hey, Frank, frag that car; there might be someone hiding there, and I always hated that model anyway.") Please note that firing wan-

tonly into anywhere that might conceal an enemy not only wastes ammunition, but tends to make you new and unexpected enemies.

TACTICAL ADVICE

One of the fun things about roleplaying games is playing unfamiliar roles. If a player doesn't know things that his highly-trained ex-military commando should know, then help him out with hints and good advice, particularly if he is committing his character to an unwise action.

HOW TO SURVIVE A FIREFIGHT

These hints are usable by NPCs as well as by player-characters. Any combat veteran should know these simple pieces of war wisdom.

Shoot first: An ambush is possibly the best option for surviving a combat. If you kill, neutralize, or run off your opponent before he can retaliate, then you're coming out ahead.

Get under cover: Make sure that you can't be shot! Concealment is good if he doesn't know you're there, otherwise make sure to get behind something solid. (Concealment is anything that hides you visually from the enemy, but does not necessarily provide protection from his firepower. Cover usually provides concealment and is stout enough to protect you from enemy firepower.)

Getting under cover is a major tactic for survival in a firefight, and one that is often not used by those untrained for it! One of the main military combat drills is that as soon as you hear the gunfire, get down and get behind cover! This is drilled into the soldier's brain until it becomes instinctual. The reason for this is that most humans, when faced with a new sensual stimuli (like a gun firing), will look around to see what's going on (fact!!) instead of diving for cover or hitting the dirt. This gets a lot of people killed in real-life combat situations—even crack FBI agents have died in firefights because they concentrated on trying to kill their enemies instead of get-

ting behind cover and then trying to kill their enemies. Referees should keep this in mind during combats; unless a character (NPC or PC) has been properly trained to seek cover (or go prone if no cover is available) when a firefight starts, make a COOL roll at Difficulty 13+. If the character fails the roll, he/she looks around to see what's happening instead! Or shoots back, if so disposed.

Deny him return fire: Keep the enemy from firing back. This is what suppressive fire is really for, to keep the enemy's head down. Realistic referees should require COOL+Combat Sense rolls at Difficulty +15 before allowing a character (NPC or PC) to put himself into danger by exposing himself to suppressive fire. Under certain circumstances, suppressive fire will be chewing up your cover and filling the air with ricochets and fragments that can actually do damage! (Characters who can't be hurt by the suppressive fire are exempt—an ACPA suit probably won't care about small arms fire.) Visual denial is good, too—that's what smoke grenades are for! It's harder to hit what you can't see.

Keep moving: If you stay in the same place for too long, your enemy is likely to find you. If you stay behind the same cover for too long, your enemy is going to find a way to get at you anyway. Change your position often to keep him guessing, or at least force him to recalculate. If you have a good position and want to stay there, make sure your buddies are moving, trying to flank the enemy while you draw his fire.

If you don't like it, leave: If things aren't going the way you like them and you can pull a powder, just leave! This is the real world, folks, where survival is more important than silly concepts like machismo and masculine ego. Remember, he who frags and runs away, lives to frag another day.

When in doubt, grenade it out: In the urban world of *Cyberpunk 2020*, the grenade is your friend. A good toss can worm a grenade into almost any cover, and the explosion will usually take care of any problem. Even with Metalgear, sitting on an exploding grenade is no fun.

Don't go through doors: People watch doors. People shoot other people who go through doors. Use an explosive (detonant, explosive weapon, etc.) to blow out the wall, then go in through that.

Use your netrunner! A good 'runner can access sensors and cameras in remote locations to give you much more information than your paltry senses can take in.

Never stand and fight: Hit hard, hit fast, and get out. If you make a stand, you give your opponent a chance to bring up reinforcements and heavy weaponry.

Where is the enemy's weakness? Find it, exploit it, and improve the odds. If most of the enemy's firepower is coming from one source, take it out! If the enemy is strong on ranged combat but weak on hand-to-hand, and you're a holy terror in melee, then get close and personal (and vice-versa). If there are too many enemies, seek to split them up, then concentrate on one party at a time. Is there some place where the enemy can't go, and you can? Then go there! (Sound tactics against ACPA suits and really heavy combat 'borgs.)

Opportunity knocks: Look around you. There may be something lying around that you can use as a weapon. Accessible vehicles are always good—need to break that roadblock? How about using some schmuck's car? (The more expensive, the better!) And how would that over-muscled cyberpsycho fare against that handy forklift? A netrunner in a computer-controlled factory can become a more fearsome foe than a squad of Militech Commando ACPA suits!

Remember, NPCs are likely to know these tricks, too. Particularly if they've got lots of combat experience (on the street, or actual military training). However, these deadly tactics are less likely to occur than you'd think—actual experienced combat troops tend to adapt poorly to the regulation-ridden life of a heavily-armed rent-a-cop. And corporate security personnel are "...well-armed, ill-tempered cops; not dedicated combat troops." (*Home Of The Brave*, page 66)

FULL-CYBERNETIC CONVERSION TACTICS

Full-conversion 'borgs deserve some mention on their own, because a 'borg can do things that no human (enhanced, in ACPA, or otherwise) can safely contemplate.

A 'borg is a fairly unique combat opportunity. With a cyborg body, a person's brain is firmly anchored and stabilized in cushioning gel. When combined with the lack of soft tissue and easily-breakable bones, a cyborg becomes an awesome soldier. It is hard to break, agile, fast, tireless, can block off "pain," and can keep the brain inside active for days on end if necessary.

A cyborg's biggest advantages are its strength and resilience. A cyborg in combat can leap between buildings and not fear the impact at the other end. Or, with momentum, can crash through walls and act immediately, without being stunned by the impact like a man in powered armor would be. The Dragoon combat 'borg can be airdropped—so can powered armor, of course, but if you drop an ACPA suit from a moving aerial vehicle at 20+ mph and the suit falls 10+ meters to the ground, the suit and its systems may survive intact, but the pilot is going to be suffering from major concussion. On the other hand, a Dragoon will take the fall, roll with the impact, and spring up running as soon as it slows down enough. All without breaking stride.

The tactical implications are staggering. Need to enter a hostile building? How about insertion through the roof? Who cares if you crash through a couple of stories on the way down; it makes for great shock value. The enemy has a machine-gun set up covering the approach route? You've got enough armor to take a few rounds, and enough speed to get to that gun before it can do more than score a couple of hits.

Corporate armies are beginning to realize the possibilities of full cyborg conversions, as are police authorities.

THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE RIGHT JOB

Player-characters are easily identified in almost any role-playing game. How do you find

them? Look for the most heavily-armored and be-weaponed people you can find; those are the player-characters. Even in fantasy games set in a medieval milieu, player-characters wear the heaviest armor and carry four times as many weapons as a normal knight would have at his disposal.

This syndrome gets worse in technological games. Once, the reigning king of the "how many weapons can I carry" contest was *Traveller™*; with additional weapons caged from other science-fiction games, the *Traveller™* PC resembled an arsenal with legs. Recently, games such as *Twilight: 2000™* and *Cyberpunk* have edged into the limelight as the contenders for the title. Because of relative wealth, *Twilight: 2000™* PCs win. The typical PC there carries one or two pistols, a knife/bayonet/machete, an assault rifle with a grenade launcher mounted under the barrel, several clips for each weapon, half a dozen (or more) grenades for the launcher, around half a dozen hand grenades, a LAW or two, body armor, a helmet, and sometimes a submachinegun for "close-in work!" Variants on this theme replace the assault rifle/grenade launcher combo with an automatic shotgun, a heavier grenade launcher, or a machinegun. *Cyberpunk* PCs aren't quite that encumbered (the ensemble described above would weigh in around 20 kg.), but only because they usually have trouble affording all that.

Believe it or not, a lot of armament isn't really necessary in the world of *Cyberpunk*! Often, packing more hardware than expected is an excellent way to attract unwanted attention—think about the stir you'd cause wandering into the local discount store carrying a pistol, much less an assault rifle! Now think about the response in the highly violent world of *Cyberpunk*. The trick is to limit one's armament to what is appropriate to the social situation at hand.

What armament is right for what situation? The paragraphs below give a pocket outline of the capabilities and usefulness of each kind of weaponry. Let your players read them, or read this section to them. Give them some idea of what's accepted (and practical) and what's not.

Natural Armament: There are a lot of ways to use one's body as a weapon. The Martial Arts skill is founded on this. Don't discount a good Martial Arts skill in combat; a strong Martial Artist can do more damage than a 9mm pistol! And he doesn't have to worry about running out of ammunition, either. Furthermore, whereas most arms can be taken from you, it's often inconvenient to have you "check your body at the door."

Knives: Knives are acceptable almost anywhere (although wearing a belt knife to high society balls is usually frowned on). Most people don't view a knife as a particularly deadly weapon, since it doesn't shoot a bullet. They are, of course, wrong, but this makes knives a good option.

The advantages of a good knife are silence, reliability, utility (you can use a knife to do the darndest things), concealability, and lethality. Of course, using a knife takes some skill, and the guts to get close to your foe. (Brass knuckles also fall into this category, but don't have the respectability of knives.)

Swords, Chain-saws, other melee weapons: Carrying one of these long, bulky, or otherwise impossible to conceal things is a tacit statement that you're going to use it. Not good. Of course, if you're going to rumble anyway, a good sword (or other large melee weapon) really does more damage than a rifle—larger wound cavity, more cutting ability (and more bleeding), and the ability to add one's strength to the weapon.

Clubs are cheap and plentiful; if you have nothing else and need a weapon, pick one up! Some people use weighted canes, thinking them naturally concealed by their function. Don't believe it; canes are archaisms, and anyone with a cane is suspected of having a concealed weapon designed into it.

Pistols: A pistol is a good weapon in any situation. Concealable, lethal, but not big or unusual enough to attract attention. Most security guards won't get too upset if you're packing a reasonable pistol, because their armor will stop your bullets (they draw the line at 12mm+ armor-smashers, though). Most of the time, all you'll need to carry is a pistol—if the situation demands more than a pistol, keep out of the line of fire and get out of the situation!

Submachineguns: An SMG is useful only in close urban combat. They were designed as "room-brooms," and they're still most useful in that function. SMGs are good for sweeping lead across large areas, so they're equally good for room-clearing and suppressive fire. Those SMGs small enough to be easily concealed are of such a small caliber that they're no good against any body armor, and the big ones aren't very concealable. Carrying an SMG indicates that you'll use it, so only carry one when you mean to use it.

Shotguns: The single best all-around urban firearm, there are so many different and interesting kinds of rounds for it that it becomes a sort of 18mm grenade launcher. It's great for area-denial, you don't have to be too skilled to use it, its ammo is cheap and reloadable, sawed-off shotguns are more-or-less concealable, and shotguns are available everywhere. The problems with a shotgun are that most of them don't have very large magazines, and shotguns are plainly not acceptable in polite company—they are straight and feared combat weapons.

Assault Rifles: These are plain murder. Unconcealable and lethal, so don't carry one unless you wish to use it. Blithely carrying one around is an invitation to be shot.

Heavy and Exotic Weapons: Same as assault rifles, but worse. These are often rare enough to be worth something on the black market, so when you carry these, you become a worthwhile target for assassination and robbery!

Furthermore, a lot of heavy weapons are very hard to come by, and very expensive. But they're worth it if you know that you're going to be facing vehicles, 'borgs, or powered armor. You're going to need at least some HEDP grenades, LAWs, a rocket-launcher, or some anti-tank hand grenades. Otherwise, prepare to spend a lot of time avoiding enemy armor.

Smartguns: Naturally, smartgun advantages make them inviting weapons. If you have sub-dermal mag-duct plugs and a smartgun outfitted for them, fine. This is unobtrusive and concealable. Otherwise, plugging in a smartgun indicates a high-price gun that's worth stealing! Don't plug in unless you want to get plugged.

RUNNING SPECIFIC COMBAT SITUATIONS

ome combat situations require referee interpretation and/or discretion—after all, the *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.* rule book didn't have space to deal with every single possibility. (Or it would be over 300 pages long!) Here are a few practical referee tips on various combat situations:

Hand to hand combat styles: Logically, not all melee styles are equal. Using a **Martial Arts** Block/Parry is not a good idea if you don't have enough arm armor to absorb the damage of what's hitting you! As a general rule, the **Dodge & Escape** skill is used when the character wants to stay out of the way of a melee attack and the damage it represents—an Active Dodge does it even better (-2 to the attacker's hit roll), and remember **Martial Arts** often have Dodge bonuses.

Athletics is really a poor skill to use in combat. It is "...accurate throwing, climbing, and balancing. It combines the basic elements of any high school level sports program." This sounds like a last-resort skill for avoiding being hit in melee combat. To reflect this, penalize the character using **Athletics** instead of a normal combat skill by halving the effective **Athletics** skill level or applying a negative modifier to the **Athletics** skill roll.

Likewise, a character trained in **Melee** is nowhere near the equal of someone trained in **Fencing** (Fencing covers such diverse styles as kendo and classic epee fencing, as well as sabers, rapiers, and even straight-sword styles). If a character with **Melee**, armed with a sword-style weapon, is going up against a character with **Fencing** and a sword-style weapon, penalize the **Melee** skill (halve it or apply a negative modifier to the Melee skill roll).

Vision-Obscurement: A simple smoke grenade will place most people in the dark; apply the -4 darkness modifier to all their combat rolls! (Unless they're normally blind and trained to cope with it anyway.) IR vision and thermographs can see through normal smoke; to obscure these vision devices, you need 'hot smoke' (smoke bombs that burn at a high temperature). Cost and availability are detailed in *Maximum Metal*. Radar and sonar aren't going to be fooled by mere smoke of any

kind; jamming these requires some sophisticated and exotic stuff (like chaff) that is inappropriate to most combat situations.

Remember, reducing visibility to zero can be useful. If you can touch him, you've not only found him, you can clobber him, too!

Explosives: Damage from most explosive devices is much greater if you can contain the explosive force. For instance, if you have an explosive tamped into a shaped charge, the effect is at least doubled. If someone is subjected to an enclosed or contained explosion, then double the damage, at least, depending on the circumstances. So, if someone wearing heavy armor throws himself on a grenade, he can expect to take at least 14D6 damage (or 21D6, if he clasps the grenade to his body and takes the entire blast!).

The Big Boys—Borgs, ACPA Suits, and Vehicles: With the addition of heavy units in *Chrome II* and *Maximum Metal*, the *Cyberpunk 2020* referee is faced with a whole new level of lethality in combat. There's a warning in the foreword to *Maximum Metal*: "What it boils down to is, this...is like all the other...deadly weapons we've introduced over the life of this game system; it's there to be used if you want to...You have been warned." Running the heavy squad in a game is tricky, because a single ACPA suit can pack more firepower than an entire Edgerunner gang. And a good combat vehicle can bring firepower to bear that rivals several ACPA suits—those AV-4s that float so serenely over the city may have a couple of miniguns and a brace of rocket pods available for use.

My advice on using heavies like these: Use them sparingly. If the PCs aren't in the middle of a full-blown war, there's very little chance that they're going to be inured to the prospect of having to face an AV-4, much less an ACPA suit or an AFV. Keep the big boys in the background; use them as unstoppable bogymen to scare player-characters in the direction you want them to go. And if the player-characters are going to cross over the line to the point where they are going to attract the attention of a combat 'borg or something even worse, make sure that they know what they're getting into before they do it. Give them plenty of warning ("As you prepare to sneak into the

research lab, you see an Arasaka Standard-B power suit walking picket patrol, carrying its .50 caliber machinegun like a big rifle. A twinkle of lights in the night sky indicate an AV circling high; an Assault 10 heavy armored car/APC is parked nearby. Now, are you sure that you want to go in?").

Important note! People are scared of vehicles. We have been trained from childhood to avoid being run over by vehicles. Fanatical soldiers who will fight other men to the death will flee from vehicles bearing down on them. Make PCs and NPCs roll a COOL roll vs 15+ to stand and face an APC, IFV, MBT or other large vehicle.

If the PCs do actually want to play tag with the heavies, then by all means let them! Remember that vehicles are terrifically restricted in urban terrain. ACPA suits tend to break through floors and discover deep cellars the hard way. Armored cars and tanks have trouble negotiating city streets (remember, streets are hollow! A weak section of pavement can make a very nasty hole when something really heavy rolls over it). AVs and helicopters have difficulty working in and around tall buildings and power lines. Player-characters on foot are a lot more maneuverable, and must use their maneuverability to try and match their opponents' edges in sensors, armor, and firepower. (Please note that NPCs faced by PCs in armor or vehicles have the same advantages.)

TEACHING YOUR PLAYERS A LESSON

very referee has problems with cocky, mouthy, or overconfident players. You know, the ones that think that they're unbeatable, know everything, and have every conceivable situation covered. The classic solution to this problem has been to make the opponents tougher; the old "more hit points" escalation that typically results in the campaign developing to a lethality level that grows beyond the referee's ability to deal with. Subtlety is better; when these people start dominating the game, the referee can humble them swiftly enough without having to resort to escalation.

Does that player-character have any technical skills? Not even **Basic Tech**? No? Then he's a prime candidate for a jammed

or damaged firearm! Fatal Fact: Trying to unjam a weapon with brute force is not a good idea, if you want to weapon to work properly. Trying to fire a damaged weapon can result in a chamber explosion, blowing up in the player-character's face.

Has that player-character been wading his way through hordes of foes without a scratch, developing a big head in the process? Then give him a nemesis, a foe that's as good and even more clever than he is! A foe who doesn't make combat mistakes, who refuses to stand still and get cut down; in short, a foe as good and as sneaky as any player-character!

Do your player-characters resemble armories with legs? Wearing heavy body armor when they go to the Mallplex? Toting shotguns, assault rifles, and so on, into restaurants, businesses, and stores? Then harass them with annoyed and irritable security guards, nervous store help, and opportunistic 'punks looking to pick up some new hardware…off the PCs' dead bodies.

Are your player-characters a bit too free with their gunplay? Try a few important innocent bystanders in the area—people like friends, allies, other player-characters, loved ones, and so on.

MURPHY'S LAWS OF COMBAT

The following sarcastic snippets of advice are largely apocryphal. Despite the humorous tone, these admonitions are quite serious; if you fight according to them and plan upon keeping them from happening, you should do okay.

- You are not Superman.
- Recoilless rifles—aren't.
- Military intelligence—isn't.
- Suppressive fire—won't.
- Automatic weapons—aren't.
- Friendly fire—isn't.
- Silenced weapons—aren't.
- If it's stupid and it works, it isn't stupid.
- Incoming fire has the right of way.
- The easy way is always mined.
- In war, all of the important things are simple and all of the simple things are hard.
- The enemy only attacks on two occasions: When you're ready, and when you aren't.

- Fortify your front well enough and they'll come from behind for certain.
- Make it too tough for the enemy to get in, and you can't get out.
- When you have secured an area, don't forget to tell the enemy.
- Team work is essential; it gives them someone else to shoot at.
- Try to look unimportant. They may be low on ammo.
- The enemy diversion you are ignoring will be the main attack.
- If your attack is doing well, it's an enemy ambush.
- All of your five-second grenades will have three-second fuses.
- If you can't remember, the claymore is always pointed your direction.
- Close only counts if you are on the receiving end.
- Anything you do may get you shot, including doing nothing.
- All war is based on deception, so deceive the enemy, not yourself.
- Never draw fire; it irritates those around you.

- Never share a position with anyone braver than you.
- Each side is convinced they are about to lose, and both are right.
- The only thing more accurate than incoming enemy fire is incoming friendly fire.
- Communications always fail as soon as they are needed.
- Everything else being equal, the side with the simplest uniforms wins.
- And, last but not least: No battle plan survives contact with the enemy.

IN CONCLUSION

Hopefully, the advice presented in this chapter has given you some ideas on how to fit those pesky combats into your gaming style with a little more ease. Just remember, the world of 2020 isn't a very nice place. There are far too many guns running around in the hands of far too many unwise people to hope for calm, safe streets. Combat is inevitable. Just don't let it throw you.

FLESHING OUT THE LIFEPATH

MIKE PONDSMITH—

PLOTPATH

OR: WHY ARE THOSE PUNK KIDS HAVING ALL THE FUN?

In our recent companion spin-off to *Cyberpunk, CyberGeneration™,* we introduced a new idea, Plotpath, a series of interwoven complications that allowed Referees to weave adventures and subplots into the lives of their ado-lescent heroes. Plotpath was designed to allow *CyberGeneration* characters to live the kind of high-angst, heavy soap-opera lifestyles expected from a bunch of nano-punked juvegangers with limited oppor-tunities and maybe less sense. We just didn't think this sort of turmoil would fit into the fast-gunning, super-cool *Cyber-punk* style.

But in subsequent conventions around the country, *Cyberpunk* players kept asking us, "How come the kids have all the fun?" And they trotted out all kinds of examples of high angst improving action/adventure, from the spy novels of Tom Clancy to the super-charged mega-violent Chinese action flicks of Ringo Lam and John Woo (where entire plotlines revolve around a tragic romance gone bad).

So we sat down and started to restructure the Plotpath. For adult Edgerunners, that is.

Like *CyberGeneration*'s path, the *Cyberpunk* Plotpath is a flowchart that links events into a loose causal web, then ties each event to a particular player. To use Plotpath, you'll need to make a photocopy for each player in your play group; making sure you keep the results hidden from your players as you use the Path to strew subplots and complications throughout their lives. It's a powerful new way to add dimen-

sion and roleplaying realism to your *Cyberpunk* adventures, especially if they've fallen into the old "we break into Arasaka and shoot everything that moves" rut.

THEMES

It's time to return to a basic idea originally expressed in *Cybergeneration*: Themes. Themes are basically Plotpath threads woven in an out of the main stopry line, centered around each character (or a popular character whose actions will strongly affect the rest of the group). A theme links all of the activities of the Plotpath together and gives the resulting structure something more than oure randomeness. For example, if a player's main life theme is a Nemesis, it makes sense to tie all of his Plotpath threads into this Theme; Lovers may be related to the Nemesis (either as Lovers or as Family); your Nemesis may be a powerful Corporate that ties into an Incident or Corporate Threat, etc.

By using central Themes, a good Referee can construct the incidents in a player's life into a continuing story, rather than a series of random adventures. The player gains a history through these events, and his or her reactions fuel the next logical step in the Theme. Themes also serve to give the player a sense of how his actions affect the larger world—karma or destiny, if you will. If, for example, the theme is Romance, the player can expect that every relationship will end badly; that each relationship will reflect upon the last, and mistakes made with one lover will come back to haunt him with the next ("This is your son, Johnny? But he just tried to kill you!") Themes, in conjunction with Plotpath, allow a Referee to construct more complex adventures with a realistic edge that allows better roleplaying.

Pick Themes carefully: make sure they match the player characters! Romance themes, for example, aren't much good to a player who spends all his time killing things; a Nemesis who just barely beats him time and time again would be better. Treachery better fits a Corporate or Cop, while the

Evil Twin Theme (which can be expressed as either a literal twin or as an NPC with very similar traits and habits to the player) might do better for non-combat types like Netrunners or Rockers. Nomads are naturals for Family & Friend Themes, but it's going to be tougher to give them a Nemesis if they're always moving to the next town.

If you're going to mix themes and types, you may find that adult characters will give you more options than playing *CyberGeneration* cyberteens. For one thing, they are more likely to have experienced the gamut of experience. However, even then, make sure you style the theme to fit the player; Solos might have Romance, but it should be with other Solos, enemies, lost team mates and treacherous beauties. And if a Netrunner has an Evil Twin, make sure his confrontations happen in the Net, not on the Street (By the way, Rache Bartmoss once claimed to have an Evil Twin, but said he had to kill him because the world couldn't face two Raches at the same time. Or so he says...).

COMMON THEMES

Romance: The player's life revolves around his or her relationships. New and old lovers enter and reenter their life, bringing problems, enemies, and strange mental games. The player can expect a string of embittered lovers plotting revenge, secret children born out of wedlock, jealous rivals, kidnappings, past secrets that come back to wreck lives, etc.

Nemesis: The player has an enemy; a group or a single foe, dedicated to his/her destruction. The Nemesis will use any means possible to achieve this goal, including harming friends, family, lovers; sabotaging plans and goals. The Nemesis isn't picky; if you happen to be near to the object of his hatred, you may also be caught in the crossfire. The Nemesis should be very hard to get rid of; just a little bit better than the player, and with an uncanny way of escaping what the player is sure will be certain death.

Family & Friends: Like Napoleon and Jimmy Carter, the player's family and friends are their biggest problems. Siblings get involved in dangerous schemes, parents are threatened, children wander off, get the Plague or are kidnapped. Friends involve the player in stupid plans or their enemies include him on the hit list. The player spends a lot of time bailing people out of trouble, lending money, and trying to make sure it doesn't happen again (without success).

Treachery & Betrayal: The player lives in a world where nothing can be trusted; friends change sides, enemies become friends. Like a character in a LeCarré spy novel, the player can never trust anyone; intrigues are constant and deadly. He can keep no loyalties, no morality. He has only himself.

Evil Twin: The player has a phyiscal or psychic twin; someone who is similar in attitude and habits—the sort of person who instantly causes him to say, "That reminds me of me..." The Evil Twin, however, walks the darkside, engaging in more risky, dangerous or even evil pursuits. When encountered by the player, the ET tries to sway the player to see things their way ("You know you're just like me... It would only take a small slip for you to do the same thing... How do you know you're the right one...?")

These are only a few very obvious types of themes; you will soon find it's easy to recognize others from movies, books and TV shows. When you link themes into a solid Plotpath, you'll discover that your players will spend a lot more time actually playing their characters rather than using them as mobile combat platforms in an ongoing firefight.

WHEN YOU'RE A CYBERPSYCHO, YOU DON'T CARE WHAT YOUR PARENTS THINK

Obviously, when dealing with adult Edgerunners, a few modifications to the *CyberGeneration* Plotpath are in order. After

G1 LOVE STRIKES!

- Mysterious secret comes between you
- *Romeo & Juliet.* Conflicting back-grounds, alliances drive you apart
- You won her/him from a former rival who won't go away.
- You broke up before
- They are captured or killed
- You are separated
- You fight constantly
- Lover has baggage (see *Friends*)
- Lover involves you in incident (see *Incidents*)
- One of you is pregnant
- Old Lover returns (see *Old Lover*)

G2 OLD LOVER

- It ended ugly last time. Real ugly.
- Broke up as friends
- She had a child - and didn't tell you till now. Hi Dad!
- One of you left for another lover
- One thought the other was killed
- You spurned the other's advances

G3 RELATIONSHIP LEVEL

- One-way obsession
- Casual thing
- Mutual passion
- Self-destructive rush
- True Love
- Sexual obsession
- One of you is cold to the idea.

G4 OUTCOME

- Ugly Breakup
- "It's better this way"
- Still Friends
- Mutual Hatred
- Unstoppable Love!
- Left you for another
- Bad-Mouthing
- You can't get over him/her
- They get killed or vanish
- They leave you for an unknown reason
- You've made a new Enemy. (see *Enemy*)

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all, a great deal of the situations shown within the basic matrix involve things that will be important when you're sixteen, but are of less importance as the character matures. Very few hardened solos experience their first love at thirty-two. This problem has allowed us to evolve a new form of Plotpath, which encompasses new elements (Corporations, Street Dangers), with Family problems on a more adult scale. This altered Plotpath also takes into account the character's past, allowing old enemies, allies and lovers to reenter the current Themes of his or her life.

FLASHBACKING

In addition to using our modified Plotpath, the plotpaths of *CyberGeneration* may also be integrated into a character's history through a technique called **flashbacking.** In this technique, suitable for games when you don't have a major campaign going on, you can use incidents in the character's Lifepath as the basis for a mini-adventure that happened in the character's past. Themes are woven with elements of the *CyberGeneration* Plotpath (ignoring any direct references to the Carbon Plague or other 2027 facts), and used to create a short adventure replaying the events. Players use a scaled down version of the character appropriate to the age at which the flashback occurred: skills are reduced, recent possessions omitted, etc. The only limit is that the outcome of the adventure Flashback must come out roughly as described in the Player's Lifepath; no fair rewriting history into a happy ending!

For example, in Morgan Blackhand's Lifepath is an incident where, as a young man, he had to take command of his cybersoldier unit when his commander went psycho. The result was he made a powerful enemy in the army (*Caused Major Humiliation to Person You Work For*). Flashbacking this, you could have the player portray an eighteen year-old Morgan before he got all his skills and cybertech, up against his old commander. A

Random incident (only survivors of a bad op) could lead to Making an Enemy. Stopping the crazed commander could involve a Friend, or possibly a Lover in the unit. All of these could be replayed out in the Flashback. By linking this to Plotpath, Morgan could now have a major enemy and the

Nemesis theme woven into his present when the still crazed and obsessed commander starts looking for his old second in command. Imagine what you could do with a really complex Lifepath; playing out incidents that were once only words on a character sheet, giving them

dimension and clarity and weaving in new plots that will influence present day events.

Themes, Plotpaths and Flashbacks: Now you've got a whole bunch of powerful new tools to add depth and roleplaying angst to your *Cyberpunk* campaign. Use them wisely and well, and you'll never end up on a gaming night with nowhere to go, plotwise; your players will continuously provide new twists and turns as they explore their character's reactions to their personal dilemmas. Who knows; they might get so far into their character's subplots that they'll forget to start shooting!

ROSS "SPYKE" WINN—

CHARACTER CREATION: DAMMIT JIM, IT'S A DIALOGUE...

Character creation is a process. Just like writing a campaign, cooking an omelet, or skinning a cat. It is a special kind of process—a dialogue. Dialogue is a conversation, usually between two people. Character creation is a dialogue.

Character Creation is a joint effort between the Referee and the Player.

Both the Referee and the Player have to realize that creating this character is a joint effort. Both will have agendas that they want to accomplish in the game. All these considerations are valid, and worthy of serious consideration by both sides.

Whether these agendas are realized is up to not only the Ref and Player, but also the group as a whole.

THE REF'S JOB

The Referee should be an integral part of character generation. The Referee must have a strong idea of the campaign's basic elements before they even approach a play-group. Even so, Referees should not feel too restricted by these decisions. If everyone later agrees that some element should change, then change it. It is the Group's game after all. To simplify the dialogue, it is usually good to give the players a one-page information sheet. If you are trying to get a game started and attract new players, the InfoSheet is a great advertisement too! (See the campaign info sheet on Page 59.)

Not only must the Ref help to design the players so they fit his idea of the campaign. He must also design some elements of the campaign around his players. It is helpful to think of the game as a skeleton. There is basic structure, but it is incomplete. Once the players all design their characters there is enough material to "flesh it out". The Referee should make notes of friends, enemies, and other subplot ideas for each of the characters.

KEEPING IT TOGETHER

One unhappy Player can ruin a campaign, but why is the Player unhappy? If the Player is simply spoiled, angry because they did not get their way, than that is the Player's fault. The Player has to remember that a Referee has several players to deal with, not just them. If another Player is in the spotlight and they feel slighted they should discuss that outside the game, instead of being childish. The Referee and Players are trying to build something—together.

A properly run campaign will have many elements. The focus will move from player to player, over the course of the story. Sometimes a single player will get a lion's share of attention, because that player has a Hero role. All the players must understand this. There are other games and other

times. It takes work on all sides or the game falls apart.

THE PLAYER'S JOB

There are certain things in character generation that may seem like a good idea at the time, but later turn out to be mistakes. Selling out to the Corporations, just to buy a car, is not really a good idea. If the player chooses to do this, they have to live with the consequences. It is the player's responsibility to live with their own decisions. It really makes no sense to be upset with a Referee, just because that Corporation that's hunting the character turns up every few sessions

THE BASIC IDEA

THE FIVE ELEMENTS

There are five elements that are necessary for a good character.

1) Role
2) Story
3) Motivation
4) Ability
5) Visualization

ROLE

In *Cyberpunk 2020* all adventurers have a role. This role is the source of the character's power. Without a Role the character would just be another slave, grinding away like all the other walking-dead. The Role is pivotal because it allows the player to formulate certain basic concepts about how the world works for them.

STORY

There are a million stories in the Naked City, and you are one of them. How old is the character? How did they get here? Where did they stop along the way? The character story is the second element, it is in most games the most

EXAMPLE A: SAMPLE INFO SHEET

CAMPAIGN INFORMATION SHEET: CYBERPUNK 2020 VER2.1

NO ONE TO LOVE

The World of 2020 is a dark and dangerous place. Corporations control the resources once reserved for nations, and gangs rule the city streets.

It is a time of confusion. There exists the technologies for amazing good, as well as horrifying evil.

The Sinningtheteks are one of the pillar Rocker acts of the cyberpunk age. After a silence of almost two years, they have released what many consider their most progressive work, **Without Compromise**. Their record company, Interrogation (a division of DMS), has held the band to a contract provision that mandates a ten-city tour. They can't do it alone. They need security, a road manager, technicians, and assistants.

Helping one of the most successful acts of the 21st century complete their last tour with Interrogation could make an aspiring Edgerunner's career. Are you up to the job?

No One To Love is a campaign for 4-6 players. Characters should be professionals with a verifiable employment history, no outstanding warrants, and the ability to make a difference!

This game will be heavily influenced by Film Noire, Industrial Music, and Modern Art. Character concepts should include but are not limited to: Nomads, Netrunners, Techs, Medtechs, Solos, and Fixers. Cops, Corporates, and Rockers will need much stronger ideas for inclusion. All characters will require a strong survival, team, and heroic motivation.

The Campaign will last approximately six months, possibly longer. We will meet weekly, Monday from 7pm-12am, at an as yet undecided location.

For More Information Call: Spyke! (813) 555-5309
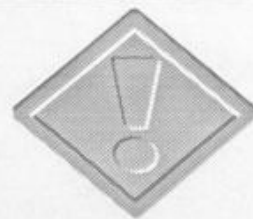
One of the most difficult things to deal with in *CP2020* is what happens when a character needs to change Roles. In a long term campaign, or a linked set of campaigns, the Role of character may need to change, or they may want to play a different type of character (without losing all of their history in the campaign). Old Netrunners and Solos usually drop into the Fixer role quite easily. Some characters could become Nomads, Cops, or Corporates. Here is a simple mechanic that can end this dilemma.

When a character changes role there has to be a significant event in their life that is roleplayed. After this happens make these adjustments to the character record. The previous role's Special Ability score is halved. Then halve that number again and that is the players starting score in the new role. If a Solo with Combat Sense +8 wants to become a Fixer then from that point on they have a Combat Sense of +4 and a Streetdeal of +2. Even though the character may increase their new special ability, they may *never* increase the old one. The character receives no new skills, but can learn new skills, and increase old skills normally.

For example, take Right Way, an experienced Solo. So far, Right has been chased by a maniacal Corporation. This Corp wanted Right dead because he was their only connection with the assassination of a Japanese diplomat. Right does not know this, but it is

unimportant, he knows they want him dead. After a few more modifications, to increase his effectiveness, Right finally goes over the edge. Some of his friends (the Team) call in favors to keep MaxTac from icing him. After therapy, the removal of most of his cyberware, and the near-bankrupting of the Team; Right is now a new, sane man. He decides he must kill the President of the Corporation. When the Team assists him in this venture, things do not go well at all.

Having originally planned to torture this Corp stooge to death, Right is forced into a dialogue with him. As the Team watches in awe, Right realizes in conversation that this Corp is a human being. The therapy, and release of stresses relating to the entire debacle, prevent Right from killing his enemy. Right realizes that he cannot kill this man. He has had too much of killing, and only wants to survive. The Corp realizes that Right is an honest man and agrees to cancel the contract on Right, in exchange for his life. Right is now free of this burden, but must survive, so he decides to become a force for positive change. Right uses his connections in the Solo biz to set up an underground network to provide safe-havens for Solos who have run out of luck. Right Way has become a Fixer.

There are problems at first, he must deal in some areas he has no experience with. Some of the skills he has will help him, some will not. It is a hard, but rewarding choice.

important. The story prevents us from saying "I have a +8 Media" and allows us to say "I am a WNS foreign correspondent, who was framed for murder." It sets us apart from all the others.

CHARACTER STORY TOOLS

There are three ways to generate a character story. The first is lifepath, the second is plotpath, and the third is free-form.

LIFEPATH

The idea of a lifepath is one of the pillars of Interlock™ roleplaying. It really revolutionized the way most of us played because the character has a history. It is a tool to define the persona.

The lifepath allows the Player and Referee to watch a character story unfold. For less experienced players and Refs, this is a good idea. As they both see the stories forming they will hopefully be drawn to their own ideas. More experienced *Cyberpunk* groups will eventually find the Lifepath limiting. The Lifepath is still a valuable tool for blank spots, or for generating subplot ideas.

PLOTPATH

Plotpath is the next step in history generation. It is a set of variables that the Referee and Player can choose.

Usually the Player and Referee choose the formative ideas of the plotpath together. They decide what types of storylines are appropriate for the character. Some players may not want, or feel uncomfortable about certain plot ideas, especially in younger groups.

FREEFORM

In some advanced games the Lifepath and Plotpath may only be complementary tools. If the Referee and the player have a strong enough story those tools may simply be used for "blank spots", or not at all. Allow your players to be creative and fresh, do not let anything limit them except the campaign ideals.

Remember: Do not ever feel trapped by the character generation system. It is a tool to help you, not a barrier to creativity.

BLUEBOOKING

Did you ever roleplay a scene you wanted to keep forever? Have you ever wanted to roleplay that pivotal event; the one that forced you on this narrow and dangerous path to fame? You can do that. It's called BlueBooking. A BlueBook is an expanded character-record, and a solo campaign, all in one package.

Frankly, I think it is the best idea gaming has seen in the last decade. I don't know who invented it, but I want to meet them.

FRAMEWORK

The BlueBook framework is a standard character write-up in whatever format you prefer. It works best with freeform, or plotpath; lifepath usually doesn't give enough information. Then the Referee and the player expand the events they feel will be easiest to play out. Before starting just do the basics, give the NPC's names, and set the opening scenes up. The Ref sets up the BlueBook like any other adventure, albeit much less complexity is required. Then the process starts. Refs and players may be initially overwhelmed by the possibilities of BlueBooking. Sit down, breathe deep, and do one thing at a time.

EXECUTION

BlueBooking is half roleplaying, half storytelling. The things that happen in BlueBook should be considered part of that character's storyline, and "in continuity." They should even be given IP points to spend for good roleplaying! The Referee and Player write the scenes back and forth. Setting and dialogue are all recorded. It is time-consuming, but the rewards are massive. Soon the player will really begin to see the character's life and motivations unfold.

There are a few hang-ups. Sometimes a Ref and Player will be tempted

to BlueBook all the time, especially if they are roommates or romantically involved. This can lead to one player having an eighty-page BlueBook, while the others are struggling around trying to finish their first scene. With experience being given for these stories it can unbalancing very fast.

Usually it's best to BlueBook between adventure scenes and during "down-sessions" when one of the players can't make it. This means the Referee has to keep four to six BlueBooks straight, while the Players only need one. Because all these things are written down, it is not as hard as it sounds. Players should be aware though, that there is only one Ref and these things take time.

A player could roleplay the breakup of their first love, the first time they were ever arrested, anything. The important idea behind BlueBooking is that the main thrust of the experience defines some element of the character. whether it be their romantic nature, their antisocial tendencies, or their "dark side." By far the most common in many games are romance. Since many players have difficulty roleplaying romance in the Team environment, the more private BlueBook is an excellent arena for these actions.

Sometimes BlueBooks turn into campaigns of their own. This can get sticky. So much time is spent on BlueBook that the main campaign drags. Some really ambitious Refs can integrate the BlueBook into the player's personal interlude, or possibly run a short spin-off campaign. There are some pitfalls to BlueBook. A player can try to use the BlueBook to keep track of elements that are too simple for BlueBook; like "where is my girlfriend?", and "I do X." The BlueBook defines the character, in the same way as a character sheet. So the player and Ref should use it as an important element, not a mundane one.

Possibly the most important element to BlueBook is the character's "pivotal event." In every cyberpunk's life there is a tangible event, or change. It is the realization that something is very wrong with the world, and

the character has no choice but to be a revolutionary. It is not usually the only choice available, and definitely not the easiest. It is a conscious decision (with most characters) and a hard one.

The Character: Emile is a Media. He has been successful in making money and exposing many "dirty secrets" of the Corporate system. At twenty-eight he realizes that there is something missing in his life. He begins to realizes this after a long struggle, tracking a story about the increasing suicide-rates among Arasaka North America Middle-Management.

Setting: The scene takes place in a windy boardroom, on the 47th floor of the Arasaka Night City Tower. With the help of a few Solos, and his Netrunner sidekick, he has rammed an AV through the side of the building and is interviewing a group of Executive Vice-Presidents at gunpoint. Live and Direct.

Emile: What is the cause of the increasing death-rate, especially suicide, among your company's lower level vice-presidents?

VP1: You have no right to be here, the authorities; OUR AUTHORITIES, are on the way!

Emile's personal bodyguard sends the other Solos to secure the outer room.

Emile: Is it true that there is an "inner-circle" in Arasaka management that wants to dominate the North American economy?
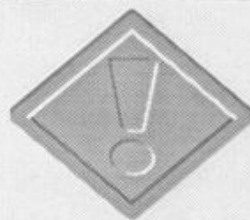
VP2: You are a fool and a simpleton. You will be dead in five minutes...

VP1: Such talk is purely incendiary, you...

Emile: Why do the NCPD death reports on the five people in question all have wrongful death investigations on-going? Are you aware that Arasaka North America's stock has fallen six points since this interview has begun? Someone is awfully scared that I am near the truth.

VP3: There have been only four suicides that relate to this insane lie. Sir, I believe...

Emile: At or about six-thirty this evening a Mister Tetsuo Sato, former assistant vice-president of design, was

found dead by apparent self-mutilation. His wrists were slashed and he was lying in a bathtub. Reliable sources tell us a single fingerprint was found in the blood of Sato, and it was not his own. How do you feel about this—Vice-President Sato?

VP2/Sato: What are you saying!?

Emile: I am saying, sir, that you have ordered the execution of your own son. Or, one of your esteemed associates in this room has.

Sato: My...Son...Is...Dead???

Emile: (to VP1) Are you Mister Ishima, Executive-Vice President of Design?

VP1/Ishima: What concern of that is yours... (he is cut off by the sounds of heavy fighting in the anteroom, the sounds of AV's are more evident outside as well)

VP2/Sato: (steps forward with a firearm) ISHIMA!!!

There is a hail of bullets in the room. Somehow Sato fires a single-shot, into the back of Ishima's head; just before Emile's bodyguard cuts Sato in half with his submachine-gun. VP3 is also caught in the crossfire, and dies.

Emile dives for cover, his bodyguard is decapitated by autoweapons fire from the doorway to the anteroom.

Emile realizes that he is done for if he does not escape right now. As the security guards enter the room, he throws three stun grenades over the ruined table he hides behind. At the same time he radios a distress call to his Netrunner. Without a response, he realizes he has been jammed and is alone. The only copy of the story, and the film to prove it, is inside his digital storage unit (DSU).

The Arasaka troops are stunned by the grenades Emile has thrown. Emile sees the half-wrecked AV and has an idea. He leaps into the open cargo-door of the AV. Immediately he goes to the rear door and opens it.

He has to do it manually, because the power is out on the AV. He gets the doors open and is greeted by the relieving sight of several News and Police AV's. He waves and is tracked by several spotlights.

After about ten-seconds the Arasaka guards are still stunned, but reinforcements are arriving. After assessing the situation, they begin looking for Emile. He sees the troops through the cracked and damaged windshield. He manages to hide himself from them, in the shadows. He tries to climb onto the roof of the AV, that protrudes like a lip from the smooth building.

A guard fires at Emile, just as he is crawling up, shattering his right leg. He manages to sit, bleeding to death, on the roof of the AV. He is fading fast.

A Police AV, with some heavy battle-damage, slides up to the slender ledge. Two cops grab Emile, just as he is fading out into darkness.

While Emile is unconscious he is booked, arraigned, and convicted of seventeen felonies. This has been complicated by the fact that WNS, NN54, and DMS have all claimed that he was working for them, and that they alone have sole rights to the data stored in his DSU. All have managed to get his case mistried, because they were not given time to adequately prepare a defense. Emile awakens, thirty-six hours later, with a full battalion of Militech troops sitting outside his hospital suite. Emile is baffled.

Emile sides with WNS, and is paid a fortune for his story. His charges are dropped, and he is set free. He immediately bolts from WNS, runs his money through six Fixers and two Netrunners, and finds himself a "shoemaker". In less than twenty-four hours he has a new face, new eyes, and a new identity. He knows that there is a deeper story here. Sure, Arasaka was killing its own people. The next question is why, and Emile had to know.

This scene illustrates some important ideas about BlueBooking. One is the extreme simplification, or total lack of, die-mechanics. If the idea or action fits the story then the action should be allowed. The Ref has to also remember that the character will survive the incident (if it is a flashback), or the character would not be in the game.

The scene also illustrates the difference in the way that description is used. Exact placement of the characters and furniture are not necessary, because the feel and style are much more important.

Lastly, the scene illustrates the "crossroads event" that leads Emile on a dangerous personal quest for one of the most powerful Corporations in the world. They killed his team-mates, their own children, and his whole life. He must make them pay. He is also aware that he must remain underground, or Arasaka will kill him.

MOTIVATION

There are three vital motivations: survival motivation, team motivation and heroic motivation. These Motivations are the basis for your entire character. It is the "why" in "why are you here?"

SURVIVAL MOTIVATION

Do you want to live? It is necessary that all characters (except maybe Goths in *CyberGen*) have a reason to live. It probably seems repetitive to some concepts, but don't be fooled. It is all too easy to call it quits in the dark world of 2020. All but the most sheltered and powerful must deal up close with the probability of death on a daily basis. How have they made it this long, and why do they go on?

TEAM MOTIVATION

Why ally yourself with these people? Your life is on the line, as well as your rep, when you throw in with a team. Does your character lack capabilities that are necessary for their survival? Is there a common enemy that threatens all? Were the players drawn into intrigue by an outside force? There has to be a reason. It can be as simple as a Band or Gang, or the complexities of ex-lovers, former allies and friends. Meeting in a bar is usually more cause to fight than work together, and this type of "easy in" is for inexperienced and bad referees.

HEROIC MOTIVATION

This motivation is a real necessity in campaigns that deal intimately with the "Revolution." The term "Heroic" may be a little strong, but it is the only one that fits. In dealing with an idea as strong as revolution each individual must have a stake in the change. Revenge, "The Search For Truth", Freedom, Personal Power; all these are proper motives for change. This motivation should not be a single thought. The singular ideas and platitudes are only a starting place.

THINGS CHANGE

Many of these motivations will change and grow unrecognizable through the course of a long campaign. It is also true that events like great victories, humiliating defeats, and the loss of comrades will fuel this fire for change. The evolution of the motivations is an integral part of character development. These motivations are not always right, correct, or truly heroic; but they do form an integral part of the character's "self."

ABILITY

This is the qualitative part of the character; The character sheet, if you will. It shows the player what they can and cannot do. This also helps to individualize the character. It is also important not to become caught up in how "good" the character is compared to the rest of the team. The team will need all the skills of all its members, if they are to succeed.

VISUALIZATION

The Idea of a character image is very important in *Cyberpunk*. In a game where style is over substance, how the characters look is important.

There are several ways to visualize your character. You can draw the image yourself, have one drawn for you (either pay someone, or get a friend to help), or you can cheat.

I personally cannot draw. Not even decent stick figures. So I use magazines. I take a photo that has the image I want and xerox it five or six times. I usually enlarge and reduce the image to lower the definition. If I have done it right the pictures come out like bad surveillance camera pictures.

See the sample character sheet to the right and the sample lifepath on the next page for a complete character example.

EXAMPLE B: SAMPLE CHARACTER SHEET

HANDLE Leery   **ROLE** Fixer

STATS AGE [20]   EV [-1]   REP [6]
INT [9]   REF [6]   TECH [7]   COOL [9]
ATTR [6]   LUCK [7]   MA [7]   BODY [7]
EMP [8/7]   Run [21m]   Leap [1.75m]   Lift [28kg]

Location	Head 1	Torso 2-4	R. Arm 5	L. Arm 6	R. Leg 7-8	L. Leg 9-0
Armor SP	0	14	14	14	0	0

Armor Type [Lt. Armor Jacket]   **Initiative Roll** [1d10+6]
Awareness Roll [1d10+14]   **Streetdeal** [1d10+15]

SAVE 7-   **BTM** -2

LIGHT	SERIOUS	CRITICAL	MORTAL 0	MORTAL 1
Stun= 0	Stun= 1	Stun= 2	Stun= 3	Stun= 4
MORTAL 2	MORTAL 3	MORTAL 4	MORTAL 5	MORTAL 6
Stun= 5	Stun= 6	Stun= 7	Stun= 8	Stun= 9

Primary Weapon Data Colt Alpha-Omega 10mm Autoloader.
P•+3•J•C•10mm•12•2•VR•50m. 3 mags, Kendachi Frag Flechettes, Shoulder Rig, Suppressor (-3 Aware), Smartlink™

Cybernetics Neural Processor (HC3), Interface Plugs (Pair)(HC4), Chiprack (HC1), Weaponlink (HC2), Techlink (HC2), Datalink (HC2), Contraceptive Implant (HC .5)

Skills Streetdeal +6, Awareness +4, Forgery +2, Handgun +3, Brawling +2, Melee +2, Intimidate +6, Persuasion +6, Hide/Evade +4, Swimming +2, Stealth+3, Grooming +3, Style +5, Education +4, Biology +3, Mathematics +3, Physics+2, Chemistry +2, Seduction +2, Social +2, Social +2, Dance +4, chip: Basic Tech +3, chip: Electronics +3, chip: Cyber Tech +3, chip: Elect. Security +3

Notes:

IMAGE

Family Background:

Leery Wieczeck is the adopted son of a Biotechnica functionary in Toronto. He grew up in an affluent suburban community, was well educated by the company, and was fully expected to serve the company for his entire life.

Things began to go awry when Leery was only twelve years-old. It was then that his father adopted an eleven year-old girl named Angela. Angela had been an abused child, cast adrift by her parents in a fit of anger. What happened wasn't really Leery's fault; the boy was in love.

When you're twelve, hormones raging, logic doesn't come into play much, and it was simple for Angel, as she called herself, to seduce him. Although she was only eleven, to Leery, she was the look and feel of what a woman was supposed to be. Leery didn't know any other families who had more than one child, and he had no idea that you simply did not sleep with your sister (even an adopted one) in beaverville.

Leery became the laughing-stock of his school, his neighborhood, and his family. In a blind rage, Leery's father blamed him for the whole sordid affair. Branding Leery a disgrace, he had the boy sent to reform school.

In 2014, corporate reform school is not a nice place. It's one of those social justice ideas that never really-worked. Instead of being miserable, Leery became an excellent criminal and a fair broker. It was a hard and brutal environment, and the braindance sessions were nightmarish. But it all only made him love Angel more. All he thought of was her, and when he was fifteen, he finally escaped. It really wasn't very hard. In fact, it was so easy that Leery now believes that Biotechnica simply let him go so they would no longer have to feed him.

A few weeks after his escape Leery was able to spirit Angel away from his father. The two eeked out a living day to day, until things finally got good. Leery's one great flaw was that he still occasionally referred to Angel as his sister. Of course, in this strange world, that didn't really shock anyone, and if it did, frag 'em.

Leery became a bit of a specialist. He dealt in only two types of goods directly. The first was pharmaceuticals, and the other was information. Leery dealt in pharmaceuticals because he received a good basic education in biology and such in Biotechnica's education system. His fraternity contacts in Biotechnica have also given him some juicy bits of info from time to time.

So he did his business, lived his life, and loved his true love. Until three months ago. Someone killed Angel. Someone at Biothechica. They did it just to hurt Leery, and they have succeeded all too well. Since there is no way for him to find out exactly who did it, he is determined to bring the whole mother down. While digging for Angel's killer, he has uncovered some really nasty stuff about Biotechnica. He continues to gather these tid- bits of infomation, waiting to turn them into the bullets that will bring the corporation to its knees.

Education:

Leery recieved the education befitting a beaver. He would have done great things had he stayed. Despite his exile to reform school, he has the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in liberal arts.

Style:

Clothes: Because of his work, Leery tends toward a conservative look. Fixers can't always make a visual statement, they have to blend into crowds too often. His current look is Icon America, though he can wear a bit more jewelry than is normal.

Hair: Leery is also conservative in terms of cut and color. He currently wears his off-red hair short and close with a part on the left.

Affectations: Leery wears a lot of jewelry, but it changes form periodically. His one constant affectation is a pair of genuine and original smoked Serengeti Drivers™ with the eyecups.

Ethnicity: Leery is of Irish descent, but he has no idea of this. He looks pure white-bread punk.

Languages: English +8, Streetslang +4

Motivations:

Traits: Leery is generally a very private person. He never really discusses his private life, other than in very broad terms. He has a persona he uses in business, but that is not really him.

Valued Person: The only person Leery really cared for was his adopted sister. He is still deeply in love with her, even though he has had an occasional fling.

Values Most: Leery has a strong code of honor. He never goes back on his word. That doesn't mean he gives his word all of the time. He will never give his word to someone he doesn't know or that doesn't come highly recommended.

People: Leery likes people, he'd better in his business. He sees them in degrees though; all is not equal in his world.

Possessions: Unusual for someone in his business, Leery has little need for material things. He buys good tools to do his work, like the occasional killer outfit. Other than that he spends most of his money on intangibles: His network, connections, and buyers. He also spent a lot of money on Angel, as she was a much more material person. He still keeps many of her things in his/their apartment.

Life Events:

16: Made an enemy on the local Police Force; a beatwalker took a dislike to Leery and continually hassles him.

17: Made a lot of money: 900eb.

18: Made a friend in the Mayor's Office; it's only a secretary, but has occasionally proven a good thing.

19: Nothing really happened this year.

20: Tragedy: Angel is killed and he knows Biotechnica did it. He will make them pay.

WORKING IN THE FRINGE CHARACTERS

ROSS "SPYKE" WINN—

ROCKERS

BEING A ROCKER IS DIFFERENT

In 2020 the Rockers are the popular voice. In a world where there is a constant background of music, Rockers have an important role in society. A Rocker can be anything but shy. They can do anything—except shut-up and toe the line.

Much of the pigeonholing that a Rocker receives is due to the ignorance of the Referee and the player. If a campaign has a Rocker, they must be a pivotal point in the campaign. No one wants to play a Rocker who can't be a Rocker. A Rocker must have a cause strongly rooted in their character-story. They must be allowed to fight the "Powers That Be." Not all Rockers are musicians. Some are street-poets, others are politicos. How the campaign is built is important to how the Rocker is portrayed. If the Player is not a strong roleplayer, then the role will not work for them. Rockerboys are not followers, they are leaders to the end.

> "Just livin' in the city is a serious task /Didn't know what hit him, didn't have time to ask."
> —Ice-T
> **Six in the Morning**

TECHIES

Many Referees don't like players who muck about changing the rules. Techs change the rules as a matter of convenience. Techs are the most valuable characters in the game in some respects. Who does everyone run to when something breaks? When a Team needs a hot piece of newtech designed to their specifications—then the Technician's real power is evident.

LETTING THEM MANIPULATE THE ENVIRONMENT

Technicians change things, repair things, and build new things. No one else in the *Cyberpunk* world can do this. Sure, a Netrunner can cripple a huge corporation, but without his deck, he's nothing. If a Tech wants to build things that do not exist, then the Referee has to deal with it. Limiting a character's Special Ability just because it upsets the Ref's carefully laid trap is poor refereeing. The Ref has to realize that that's life, and come up with something else.

One of the things that bothers Referees most is the very broad description of the special ability **Jury-Rig**. What the Referee does not see are the great roleplaying possibilities in the use of Jury-Rig. Even if the Tech has no tools or equipment, they can attempt a complex repair. What the Referee must realize is that there is a great roleplaying sequence right there. This Tech cannot try to rig a jumper without a piece of wire—so where does the Tech get the wire? They can scrounge off another piece of equipment or use the metallic coating of a gum wrapper, but it should be roleplayed. Not everything a Tech does has to be "on the fly," some devices can be pre-built.

PREBUILT DEVICES AND GIMMICKS

The world of 2020 is a world of innovation. Every day things appear in the marketplace that were not there before. Even though many of these innovations are simply corporate improvements to earlier designs or ideas, many of them come from the Street. These street inventions don't have the benefit of corporate research and testing; they don't always work all the time, and they are usually dangerous. But they do things that no one else does, so they sell.

A technician can prebuild things that can help the team, protect themselves, or support themselves. When a tech builds something that is outside the norm (which is up to the Referee) then a simple process can determine how long it will last, and what quality it is.

What is considered normal technology is really up to the Referee, but here are some guidelines that can help. The first is an improvement. Improvements are simple modifications to existing designs. They usually involve things like making custom grips for a pistol (to improve accuracy), or lowering the brightness of a lamp (to decrease power consumption). An improvement does not usually involve any radical ideas, and shouldn't be more than an Average skill roll. Improvement lasts until the device is damaged in such a way that it needs to be rebuilt.

The second is an innovation. Innovations are radical ideas that improve a device's efficiency or effectiveness. An Innovation would be something like the development of the electrothermal process to double the muzzle velocity of a firearm (*Chromebook 2*), or the significant miniaturization of a piece of equipment (greater than 25%). Innovations are much less common on the street, but do occur. An Innovation should be a Very Difficult skill roll, and should only last about 1 year (by then it would generally be accepted as normal, if not superseded by newer ideas)

True Invention does not happen as much in 2020 as it used to. With so many radical ideas already in use, it is harder to come up with something truly original. An invention is something like the cloning process (at least one that works), or binary propellant firearms design (like the Army's M31a1 Assault Rifle System), that renders existing technology clearly inferior. Invention is always difficult. Nearly Impossible skill rolls are common, but are usually modified by time and good roleplaying. In the world of 2020 it is not unusual for whole bodies of knowledge to be outdated in five years. True inventions will only be "special" for about five years.

Referees should remember that the point of playing a Tech character is to innovate and repair things that no one else can. It is not uncommon for a Tech character to be built around a single invention. That invention can be a pivotal role in the campaign as well which also helps to delineate the Tech's importance and position in the Team. This invention can be of varying importance, but should never be less than a significant improve-

ment in an important technology (like power consumption).

HARDWARE ALTERATIONS TO THE NET

One of the most exciting possibilities with Tech characters is their ability to make physical changes that effect the Net. Net geography changes daily in 2020. These changes are due to the diligent work of Techs across the globe. Hardware alterations include (but are not limited to) "back-doors," shunts, trips, and bugs. They also include ideas like building your own uplink LDL, coopting an entire datafortress, and all the other things that it is virtually impossible for anyone short of Corporate resources to do.

A hardware alteration can be as simple as installing a breaker in a major Net LDL, or sub-grid. That way, if things get too hot, a flip of a switch will "shut down" everything for about a half second (until the backup grids kick in). It could also be as complex as designing a replacement chip for a new satellite that gives someone totally untraceable full time access to that satellite. Of course designing that chip, getting it made to spec, and switching it with the real chip would be a small campaign in itself; but it's the coolest thing singe sliced bread.

MEDTECHS

Medtechs are probably the most difficult characters to play in 2020. They are great for a team to have around if someone gets shot, or needs a new mod' installed. Most of the time they just sit around bored out of their minds. If a player wants to be a Medtech then the Ref has to plan definitive actions that they can perform, at least once a session.

A definitive action for a Medtech is more than just taping-up someone's broken ribs. If the team is involved in an extraction then the Medtech could help by identifying "loyalty devices" and trying (not always successfully) to remove, or defeat them. The Medtech could possibly identify the new virus that is killing people

in the Zone, if given the tools and time. Of all the roles in 2020 this role is the most over-specialized. Medtechs should usually only be run in "Medtech" games.

Medtechs are also considerably less powerful characters because the skills the need for their profession are wildly different than those needed on the street. A player-character Medtech could be an average Medtech and a pitiful mover, or below "average" Edgerunner skill levels in both areas. All in all, an artful roleplayer and Ref are necessary.

NETRUNNERS

THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

Netrunners are sometimes trivialized due to their complexity. It is all too easy for gamemasters to give the party an NPC Netrunner, or an AI "slave" rather than deal with the second campaign that the Net adds to *Cyberpunk*.

Some Referees may feel that allowing a long netrun sequence will cause all the other players to be bored out of their minds. They sacrifice a key element of the game, the "other world" of the Net, to relieve a fear of losing the play-group's interest.

Netrunners are the truest cyberpunks. Alongside Rockers they define the age. The Information Revolution ran from the birth of the PC (say 1982) to the invention of the cybermodem in 2005. After the invention of the cybermodem the Information Revolution was over; the Cyberpunk Revolution had begun. The invention of the cybermodem, along with the perfection of expert system technology, made programming a luxury instead of a requirement. It allowed the common man to see the length and breadth of human knowledge. To navigate this new world the user did not even have to be literate! With the invention of the Ihara-Grubb Transform Algorithms all data, no matter what the type, was accessible in a common format. We had created a new universe, like gods.

There are a number of ways to integrate a Netrunner into your campaign.

THE RIGHT WAY

There are ways to delineate the Netrunners role in the game without unbalancing the attention given to the players. If you think of a Netrunner as a Sorcerer (from a fantasy game) it brings things into a slightly different perspective. Try and visualize the programs in the Net as spells. The Net is like an astral battle.

Timing is an important thing in Netrunning. Some people may be inclined to giving a Netrunner several more actions per turn than normal, due to that "speed of light" myth. That is not the reality.

Data and programs may move at the speed of light across cables of glass; the human brain, however, moves at about three-hundred miles per hour. Just because a human is jacked in to the computer does not mean that their brains violate natural laws. Once the Netrunner has initiated a program, then that program moves at the speed of data. So for every turn the party has, the Netrunner has one as well.

Some Referees may feel that this is a little too limiting in terms of a stylish *Cyberpunk* game. If that's the case then slightly more attention could be given to the Netrunner in adjunct ways as well. A Ref could have solo sessions for especially long runs, or just send the other players for pizza while quickly handling an important run. If the Ref feels even this is too disjointed, then giving the Netrunner an extra action every turn without penalty (Only if they are jacked) could allow for that frantic netrun. E.g., trying to crack the security system while the Team takes heavy fire from a building's automated security guns.

THE SOFTWARE DILEMMA

One of the hardest things for a Referee to deal with is the problem of software. Netrunners who make about fifty or sixty grand can pretty much buy the best that is on the market, and there is no mechanism to simulate the deterioration of a software's effectiveness. Netrunners are even more powerful if

they can get access to an expert-system or A.I., they simply have the computer write them a great piece of software. In 2020 technology is changing daily. New programs are invented daily, and so is new ICE. To keep the Netjocks on their toes, and keep them busy buying new software, I use the following guidelines.

There are three levels of software:
- Consumer
- Customized
- Original.

CONSUMER

Consumer is off-the-rack code. Usually built by a high volume distributor. The code in these programs is usually easy to crack—they don't remain effective for long. A program's strength drops by one every two weeks, until it reaches STR 1. Consumer versions of software usually cost about half the listed price, except controllers, which don't vary in quality much.

CONTROLLERS

Sometimes a controller will not be able to access a piece of equipment because the equipment's controller interface is radically different. This does not happen often (about 1% of the time), and usually only in odd situations (the Mars Expedition mother-ship had a completely custom vehicle interface to prevent Netrunners from messing with the controls). Programmers can look at a nonstandard controller interface and write a patch on a Difficult **Programming** check.

CUSTOM

Custom software is usually what Netrunners deal in. It is small-press software that a Netrunner has someone build for them. Then the Netrunner modifies part of the code to "personalize" the program, and cut down on the software being tracked. Custom code usually costs the listed price and the strength erodes at a rate of one point per month until the program reaches half-strength (round down). The Netrunner can keep the

program "fresh" by making a Difficult **Programming** task once a month. This also takes several hours of programming time, three hours for every point of program-strength.

BUGS

Any programming can result in a bug. In 2020 bugs occur on a fumble of the Net runner's **Programing** skill. Bugs do not usually occur in consumer code (very occasionally a consumer program will have a bug; roll a double-fumble, a one twice on a single D10, for this to occur). A bug will do one of two things. It will either cause the program to run poorly (-2 strength, negative strength not possible), or cause the Netrunner's cyberdeck to crash whenever it is activated. Repair of a bug takes 2D10 hours minus the Netrunner's **Programming** skill. Access to an expert system cuts the debug time by half.

ORIGINAL

Original software is hugely expensive and vastly superior to most other software in 2020. It is also very rare. The proliferation of expert-system technologies, and the lack of free time for most Netrunners make finding the resources difficult. Artificial Intelligences can, and do, write custom software. Few Netrunners have these resources, or can even steal them for long enough to do the job. Even with the resources of a government, the strain of constant need makes programming custom 'ware a herculean effort. So where do most users get custom software? They steal it.

Stealing software is a difficult job in 2020. If you steal the original then the developer knows its gone. If you steal a copy then someone else may have a chance at it as well. Custom software is horribly expensive to buy (usually five times the listed price), is prone to bugs (2 in 10 chance), and if "they" find out it is stolen, you'll be hunted down like a dog. Original software degrades at a rate of one point of strength every three months, and can be maintained the same way as custom 'ware.

BENJAMIN WRIGHT—

THE FRINGES

The core of any roleplaying campaign is its characters; they are the single most important element of the plot. They are what makes a roleplaying game different than a story— they are the "heroes" (protagonists, main characters, whatever), but they have an active role in deciding what happens. The most important thing to remember is that to have a successful campaign, you need to have characters that will further your plot. A Corporate PC won't be much help in a street brawl, and a Nomad will be helpless in a boardroom meeting. Therefore you, as referee, must first lay down your assumptions about the game— where it will happen, what is its scope, and who are your players? Is your game going to change the world? If so, then you'll probably want Rockers and/or Corporate characters. If your game will be somewhat more street-level, you may want Cops or Techies. The situations are not always that limiting, but the point is: you, the referee, must decide what character roles you want/need in your campaign. Then they will all fulfill duties and have purposes integral to the plot.

Another point to remember is the idea of location-stressed characters. Some roles, especially Techies and Fixers, find themselves tied to a certain area. Fixers are location-stressed characters because of the geographically limited expanse of their networks, techies because of their need for a workshop and a familiar area in which to find parts. If your game is going to be an cross-national road trip like *Land of the Free*, you don't want people who are tied down to one city; instead you'll want skilled drifters, like Solos and vehicle experts (Runners, from *When Gravity Fails*, or Vehicle-Specialized Solos from *Home of the Brave*). If you're doing a one-city game, a vehicle character is a bad idea because he'll never go anywhere. A globe-spanning (or even system-spanning) campaign will probably demand an international cast of characters.

Because the most "typical" (the most commonly played) type of *Cyberpunk* game is a corporate-sponsored freelance extraction, many of the major character roles see little action as player-characters. Corporates, Rockerboys, Techies and Medtechies suffer from this problem. These "fringe characters" may be the least-played characters in the *Cyberpunk* game, but their importance in the world of 2020 is unquestionable. It therefore stands to reason that they should be able to provide a great deal of roleplaying enjoyment. However, a few quirks of the *Cyberpunk* game as a whole, and these character roles in particular, must be understood in order to build the fringe characters' appeal and more successfully work them into campaigns.

First, there is the issue of combat. While most players like to think that they put roleplaying first and combat second, this is seldom true. How many times have you heard a *Cyberpunk* player say, "I wanna shoot something," or "God, we haven't been in a good fight in a long time." Most roleplayers enjoy a good combat once in a while, whether they feel guilty about it or not. Since many of the *Cyberpunk* character roles are not designed for combat, these roles see less use than Solos, Cops and Nomads. The way to solve this problem is to either play them in a less violent campaign, or to make the character combat-ready. A physically capable Netrunner is not impossible, Techies can work as battlefield engineers and demolitions experts, and there are a lot of combat medics left over from the 2nd Central American Conflict. Don't get trapped by the stereotypes of a character class.

Breaking stereotypes is, in fact, the best way to free up your roleplaying opportunities. A Rockerboy does not have to be a musician—he may be a politician (see the basic rulebook and the *Rockerboy* supplement)! Similarly, a Medtech doesn't have to be a surgeon—he may have a **Medtech** ability of +1, but his **Pharmaceuticals** skill could be as high as +9. Such a character could be a walking drugstore, carrying gas sprayers and airhypos, boosting his own reflexes and knocking out whole roomfuls of security guards. Experienced players

might complain that such a character will start off with no money; true, but you and your referee could work out a deal whereby this character gets paid for his skills with drugs rather than for his Medtech ability, thereby treating him as a +9 Medtech for pay purposes. Non-stereotyped characters and a flexible referee are a great combination.

Another way to make better use of the "fringe characters" is to work up a campaign around them. A corporate boardroom campaign can be fascinating stuff—imagine refereeing five corporates who work deals with and against each other, vying for the economic prosperity of an entire nation! Many players (and referees) shy away from such an idea, because it is low-combat and unfamiliar territory. The answer to the "low-combat" complaint is that low-combat is not necessarily a bad thing, that successful negotiations and seductions can be just as rewarding, and besides—combat can always occur in the halls of a *Cyberpunk* corporation! As for the complaint of corporate boardrooms beings unfamiliar, consider this: how many firefights have you been in, and how many episodes of *LA Law* have you watched? 'Nuff said.

Campaigns built around fringe characters also make gamers uncomfortable because they also require that many (if not all) of the characters be of the same role—the worry is that either the characters will be too similar, or everyone will play "my Resources is higher than yours." Not a problem. In an all-corporate campaign, each character could be in charge of a different division; each Corporate has a +8 resources, but in a different area. Consider what happens when the Vice-President of Finance needs some extra bodyguards due to death threats he's receiving. He has to ask the VP of Security for some extra men, but the Security VP refuses because of the budget cuts in his department...cuts dictated by the Finance VP! Is Security on the level, or is he holding a grudge? Or did he actually send the death threats? The roleplaying possibilities are limitless: betrayal, deception, greed, powerbrokering...ah, *Cyberpunk*. Another possibility for an all-Corporate campaign could be one in which each executive is from a different corporation. Powerplays

and grudge matches would get even bigger, and that means more roleplaying.

The potential adventures available to a Corporate-oriented campaign are numerous, and the same goes for any character-oriented campaign: imagine *General Hospital's* emergency ward with armed security guards. You've got sex, drugs, gore, profiteering and lawsuits to boot! Characters could include the uncaring doctor who rides on his reputation (Medtech), the accountant who links the staff and the management (Corporate), the combat-vet-turned-surgeon (Medtech), the nurse who's moonlighting as a nightclub singer and whose nights are too long for her days (Rockergirl), the receptionist who's using the hospital's computer as a data haven (Netrunner), the orderly who is selling the hospital's drugs on the street (Fixer), and others. Now imagine the adventures when the city is rocked by riots—the hospital, packed with trauma patients, is used as a fort by the riot police. All this, and the words Trauma Team never came up once!

The trick to running a character-oriented campaign is that the referee must want to do it; such campaigns require some extra background and research, which means more time. The players must also want it—not all roleplayers want such unconventional characters or such unconventional campaigns. That's fine, too. There's room for just about any character role in the good ol' freelance extraction adventure (yes, even for Corporates, Rockerboys and Medtechs). This is possible through the wonders of—new character roles! The *Cyberpunk 2020* character creation section invites roleplayers to create new character roles with new Special Abilities. Moreover, several supplements have been published for *Cyberpunk* and many of them contain new roles or new variations on the old standards. Private Investigators, Panzerboys, Prowlers and Streetpunks are all possible choices as *Cyberpunk* characters.

Following is a discussion of each *Cyberpunk* character role. Their status as a fringe character or not, their roleplaying possibilities, and alternate roles that fill the same basic niche in an adventure are given. Read on, and leave the stereotypes behind!

CORPORATE

The most immediately obvious fringe characters, Corporates are usually the "bad guys" of a *Cyberpunk* campaign. However, when money is god, corporates can be messiahs—feared, respected or even loved by the general populace. They can also be moles, working to undo corporate evil from the inside. Corporates can also be profiteering James Bond types; wearing a suit and packing a pistol, they go into the field and keep an eye on their operatives. Variations on the classic role are the political bureaucrat, known as an Administrator (see *When Gravity Fails*), and the legal-eagle versions of Judge and Lawyer (see *Protect and Serve*).

ROCKERBOY

This is a fringe character due to the narrow view of a Rocker as a musical performer. As the *Rockerboy* supplement explains, Rockers can be comedians, political activists, performance artists, politicians or street poets. A Rocker could even be a religious leader, such as a preacher or televangelist. Also remember that not all members of a band must be Rockers; in fact, the singer is usually the only one with Charismatic Leadership, while the musicians can be any role at all as long as they have Play Instrument (and maybe Perform) skills. Rockers can also be musically-oriented without being stage performers—DJs, VJs and MCs can be Rockers as well if they have a message.

TECHIE

With technology accelerating as fast as it is in 2020, Techies are absolutely vital characters. They are relegated to fringe character status because: few referees worry about things like maintenance and breakdowns, and few players think about "tech artistry." First, remember that the more advanced and experimental the technology, the more maintenance it is going to require and the more bugs it will have. Second, Techies consider technology an art form, an enlightened pursuit; they take pride in their creations and should be allowed to experiment and be

creative. This is "tech artistry." A common problem with Techies is their need for a supply of parts—but remember the abundance of autolathes, portashops and microfactories (not to mention bathtub biotech and the usefulness of discarded materials). Finally, some people feel that **Jury Rig** is not a very useful ability, but keep in mind that it also allows "kitbashing"—the altering, improving, recombining and inventing of new devices from assorted parts. For many players, the "MacGuyver" approach to Techies allows for full interactivity with other players, as does the specialized demolitions techie. An alternate character role for Techies is the Scavenger (from *Wildside*).

MEDTECH

These characters get little attention because they are seen as rather passive and static—all they seem to do is operate in sterilized environments or staple together wounded Solos during fire-

fights, right? Wrong. Medtechs can be agile, intelligent combat medics, offensive chemical and germ warfare specialists, corporate-oriented health inspectors, gene-splicing biotechnicians, sly chemistry wizards, or mad-scientist cybertech experimenters. Also remember that any character can have **First Aid** skill, so unless you plan on a lot of surgery going on, the team's medic doesn't need to be a Medtech.

MEDIA

Whether or not Medias are fringe characters is debatable, but it should be noted that if a campaign is not focused around them (that is, a media-reporting team or a pirate media broadcast group) then they are usually hard to work into adventures. This does not always have to be so—Medias can report while undercover, serve as team backups, act as conspirators, or even be employers for player-characters. Variations on the Media include war

correspondents and tabloid sensation-alists. For Medias who plan on operating undercover, an excellent choice for an optional character role is the Spy from *When Gravity Fails*; the Spy can choose **Credibility** as one of his "cover" abilities and his other ability can be whatever will aid his cover role.

NOMADS

Occupying much the same position as Medias, Nomads tend to be difficult to integrate when the campaign is not focused on Nomad issues. Many Nomads wind up in edgerunner teams as second-rate Solos who drive well, and they never use their **Family** ability. This isn't fair to the character or the player, so some consideration must be paid to a Nomad's niche in a campaign; remember that Nomads do not have to be vehicle-oriented. Urban squatters can often organize into clans for protection, but this is where the line is blurred between Nomads, Vagrants and Streetpunks (see *Solo of Fortune* and below). Space-based Nomads are also possible by using Workgangers or Space Pilots (both from *Deep Space*). Aside from the traditional family-member, Nomads could also be well-organized truckers, Road Warrior-style raiders or oceangoing pirates. While Nomads can be difficult to use in "traditional" campaigns, a Nomads-only game can be wonderful; imagine a cyberpunk cowboy story!

COPS

Once again, if your campaign is not focused on them, Cops can be difficult to integrate. However, consider the possibilities of an undercover cop in the midst of the player-characters. This is another good place to use a Spy with **Authority** and another ability. When you have a "typical" team of edgerunners they're usually up to a lot of illegal activities, so a better choice might be a Private Investigator (from *Hardwired* and *When Gravity Fails*). Also remember that Cops do not have to be city-employed policemen; they can be CIA Law-Div, Interpol, C-SWAT

officers or even corporate security (who might make use of the Snivel ability from *Hardwired*).

FIXERS

So much has been said about Fixers in the *Wildside* supplement that it would be pointless to repeat it here. However, if you need an alternate role to Fixer, try a Private Eye, a Psychologist (with the ability of **Psychology**), a Con Man (from *Wildside*) or maybe even a Dancer/Prostitute (also from *Wildside*).

NETRUNNER

These are sometimes fringe-characters because the Net seems to be their exclusive domain. But this is wrong; Netrunners are just extra-skilled at its use. Any PC can use the Net, and probably should on a regular basis. As far as integrating Netrunners—never forget the power of Controller programs! Having a netrunner around is better than carrying 100 meters of Detcord. As for dealing with the Netruns themselves, the best approach is to try to arrange the big runs between gaming session if that will make it easier. And don't underestimate the value of doing a background check on someone through their credit history and records (doing a goto). If you want an alternate character to a Netrunner, you're pretty much out of luck—they're totally unique.

SOLO

Solos certainly aren't fringe characters—they're the single most popular role in *Cyberpunk*. However, maybe they should be fringe characters; there are too many of these guys! Remember Molly from *Neuromancer*? She wasn't special because she was a Solo—she was a Solo because she was special. One enemy Solo should scare your players; this guy's a professional killer! Keep in mind that Solos have an "uncanny ability to avoid harm" (as well as cause it), so it's not possible that every member of a streetgang or security unit will be a Solo (they're Punks

and Cops; see the Streetpunk description in the *Wildside* supplement). Optional characters for Solos are plentiful—there are Prowlers (from *Wildside*), Space Marines and Specialized Solos (from *Home of the Brave*), Troopers (from *Maximum Metal*), and such new variations as ex-convicts and military-service criminal-rehab candidates can have specialized tactics abilities.

ERIC HEISSERER—

UNDERSTANDING THE SHIFT IN POWER

What are "fringe characters?" These are the lonely, least-played character careers in the *Cyberpunk* universe: the Rockerboy, the Corporate, the Techie, the MedTechie, and even the Netrunner. Why are these characters ignored by players? To understand that, you must also understand the nature and power of these roles.

Conflict is a useful tool to analyze how a character operates. If you want to see what drives a character class, create a situation in which conflict occurs and use that character's special ability to resolve the conflict. When a Solo is faced with conflict, he usually shoots it. That's his expertise. That's where he put his career points, and that's what his special ability dictates. There's nothing wrong with this—he is being a Solo, true to form. But as a player, he is also avoiding the opportunity to roleplay his way out of the conflict. Fringe characters generally require much more roleplaying to resolve conflict—a Corporate calls someone to deal with it or delegate it to, a Rockerboy gathers his minions and motivates the crowd to conquer it en masse, etc. In this sense, these characters challenge conflict indirectly. They don't deal with it personally, but instead utilize other tools that may not be as quick or effective as a Solo's. It makes the Corporates, Techies

and Rockerboys seem passive. Players tend to shy away from these characters because they may not feel confident enough to rely on their roleplaying capability as a means of conflict resolution, or because they don't see a way to get these characters in on "the action" of the game (i.e. combat).

It's easier and faster to rely on the dice. Players get a chance to vent their frustrations with the conflict this way, and if something goes wrong the dice can be their scapegoat. With fringe characters, the intelligence and wit of a player suddenly becomes the measure of his character's success, and those are hard things to measure. If a player rolls and misses a target, he knows three things: 1) the die roll is responsible for his miss; 2) he has a substantial number that he can affect with luck points to reach his goal immediately; and 3) he can blame the die roll on bad luck. When a player 'misses' in a roleplaying scene, he has no obvious number to affect. Peer pressure could easily make matters worse—instead of labeling the PC as "unlucky" he could be called "unprofessional" and "irrational" due to errors in roleplaying. Not good.

This is one of the main obstacles to overcome with fringe characters. Another problem is stereotyping.

BREAKING FROM THE CLASSIC STEREOTYPES

As Kermit the Frog once said, "it's not easy being green." It's not easy being a fringe character, either. Generally, when a person thinks "Corporate" they think "sleaze in a three-piece." Rockerboys invoke images of grundgy, heavy metal guitarists with wild mohawks and wilder wardrobes. Techies are seen as *Cyberpunk's* repairmen — toolbelts, greasy faces, and faded jumpsuits.

These stereotypes are two-dimensional and they need to be broken.

To increase the popularity of the "fringe characters" of *Cyberpunk*, the

referee has to find ways to overcome the typical paradigms that players set when considering these characters for play. In order to do so, however, the referee needs to do the same thing for himself, and thinking 'outside the box' isn't always easy.

This chapter focuses on more creative ways to utilize the fringe characters (Rockerboy, Corporate, Techie, Medtechie & Netrunner), either as player characters or active NPCs. These examples are just to act as a jump-start to help you think of these roles differently. By no means are they the limit of the character. If you've already invented clever ways to play or run a fringe character in your campaign, feel free to use these examples as fresh character ideas. If you've been having trouble integrating a fringe character into your campaign, or you've been ignoring one or more of the character Roles for too long, this chapter should help you out of this situation. Every Career Role in *Cyberpunk* is a unique and important one. Some are just misunderstood.

THE ROCKERBOY

As stated in the *Cyberpunk 2020* rulebook, the Rockerboy can be much more than just a rocker. The challenge with the Rockerboy is to make those other sides more appealing to players. Here are some ideas.

THE BRAINDANCER

This is your adrenaline junkie. He's contracted with a major production studio to live life on the edge and film it as he goes along. Danger is a pseudonym for eurodollars. So who does this suicidal maniac hang out with to get the biggest bang for his buck? The other PCs, of course! He doesn't have to involve himself in the combat to become marketable. He just needs to find an audience to appeal to and a product or service to sell.

Example: The PCs launch into a barroom firefight when Jake, the party's braindancer, spots an unattended beer bottle on a table at the other

done. He has secret contacts throughout the city, and his followers grow everyday. But he's a thorn in society's side. So he needs protection.

Example: Tanya leads the West Coast faction of the River Raiders, opposing Petrochem's efforts to utilize the Pacific Ocean as a toxic wastebasket. Through her network of spies, she learns that Petrochem plans to load a tanker full of chemical hazards, set it out to sea, and sink it with a modified cargo submarine. The media will be informed that an unknown aggressor sank the ship, and neglect to mention its cargo. Tanya needs to plan and organize a mission for the party to stop this.

THE ROCK BAND

A good team campaign can be built around the concept of the touring band. To ensure a successful campaign around this concept, all players must want it to happen, and (as trivial as it may seem) everyone must be happy with their role in the band. If you have three people who want to be drummers and one who wants to be a singer, you have a problem. Small conflicts are fine in some cases, but you don't want the characters to overlap too much. Read *EuroTour* for more inspiration.

THE CORPORATE

The Corporate is the wheeler and dealer of any group. Unlike the Fixer, who usually waits for jobs to come his way, the Corporate creates jobs and missions. The Corporate has an objective to fulfill, and will utilize all the resources necessary to get the job done. Here are some ways you can mingle Corporates with other PCs without stirring up too much distrust between players.

THE TEAM'S FINANCIER

If the party knows he's floating the bill, chances are they won't mind that he's with a firm. This Corporate works well with a revolutionary, because he can fund the revolution from his company's pocket—

end. He runs, dives, leaps, and rolls his way to the table, dodging gunfire and other flying obstacles all the while. As he grabs the half-empty beer bottle he announces (for the benefit of the braindance) "I'll risk life and limb for the cool refreshing taste of SityDraft beer."

THE UNDERGROUND REVOLUTIONARY

A born leader, and most likely leader of the PC party. He is fighting the enormous structure of (insert corporation or government here) to right the wrongs it has

especially if he has permission to do so. Why would that happen? Think of how happy DuPree Chemicals would be if Petrochem were out of the way...

THE TEAM'S IN-HOUSE CONSULTANT

This Corporate works well as an advisor to the PCs when they negotiate or meet with other Corporates. The character is usually retired, so he's older than the rest of the party, which can earn him some respect. In order for this Corporate to function, however, you must present a number of situations where his knowledge and skills benefit the rest of the party.

Example: Mr. Johnson shakes the hand of Nicklaus (the PC Fixer), smiles, and steps into his sleek Luxus Nightrunner. As he drives away, Jonah (the PC Corp) steps forward from behind around the dimly-lit basement table and waits for their Techie to emerge from the dark. He arrives with a strange handgun.

"Tell them what you did to it," says Jonah.

"Well, I just bored it to hold 12mm rounds, stabilized it up here with these vents, restructured the frame with titanium so it won't require a cyberarm to use—"

"Ladies and gentlemen, if we start to mass-produce this pistol, it could rival the works of Eran Malor. I can get the funds to start this little project, Ratchet can deal with the manufacturing end, and you edgerunners can expose its power to the public!"

THE SPECIAL PROJECTS DEPARTMENT, 22ND FLOOR

starting their own business together as mutual allies, instead of competing with each other as in the previous example. This is usually just an extension of the Entrepreneur concept, except that the focus will be more on something like the **Stock Market** or other Corporate-specific skills, because you don't need to fit the Corporate with the rest of the group. They are all company men, and they are all interested in making money. A small stock brokerage firm or a management consulting firm could work. The wide and unusual client base is the drive of this campaign.

THE TECHIE

In order for a Techie to be an appealing and active character in the party, and not just the party's "mechanic," you need to make his talent and trade
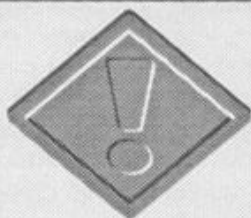
"You mean I can make a netrun on a 'beep for bucks' machine?"

"Sure! They won't be well defended, since it's never been done before, and if I'm right, you might be able to follow the data stream to the main bank datafortress and have fun through the back door."

THE SYSTEM HARDWARE BUSINESS

A Techie-Netrunner team can make a frightening group of data thieves. All they need is a fairly legitimate consulting or repair business to get them in the front door. This type of campaign takes a different angle in that information becomes the tool and trade of the game. By doing so, the referee must provide and maintain a large amount of corporate data for the PCs to acquire and trade. If the referee isn't interested in building a complex network of plots and secrets, this is not a good campaign to launch. Things can get complicated overnight. The benefit for a data-heavy campaign is that player involvement can increase dramatically. A good player loves a good mystery, and almost everyone loves handouts and props. If you can devote the time and effort, have fun.

Example: "We got a call the other day from Biotechnica. One of their networking processors went through a meltdown in payroll 'cause they tried to handle all the personnel accounts in one day. They called us to fix it."

"...And? What did you get—account numbers?" asks the Netrunner.

"Heck no. They had that all locked up. But we did have full access to the HR datafiles for every Biotechnica employee in the state. We had to make sure that the network functioned properly, you see," states the Techie.

"I'm still waiting," the Netrunner says flatly.

"Covert operations. Internal Affairs department. Twenty-one names of individuals hired to spy on their own company! Forty thousand lines of data."

"Beautiful, beautiful... I'm sure there are a number of people in Biotechnica who would like to know those names, along with a detailed briefing of their mission and findings."

THE MEDTECHIE

Too many times have I seen the MedTechie reduced to the party's "first-aid guy," ordered to patch up the Solos when they flirt with death. Players who try MedTechies sometimes have the notion that they can play them as solos with self-healing powers. Don't let this happen. As a referee, you have to give the MedTechie more power, but on the MedTech side, not on the Solo side. One option is to have the MedTech roll add to Awareness/Notice. With this option, a MedTechie can walk down the street and say "that guy is on Blue Ice...that girl has Skinweave but she's getting a rash from it...that borg is having problems with cyberware rejection..." Here are some character ideas.

THE "PHARMACIST"

If your players or your PCs aren't big on morals, a MedTech who invents drugs for resale is a nice option. The pharmacisct can manufacture drugs to suit a variety of purposes—combat, euphoria, fear, death, etc.—and sell them to the highest bidder: corporations, Fixers, streetscabs, or the other PCs. The pharmacist is also easy to fit into a campaign like the Entrepreneur, as he'll need a Fixer to do his negotiations and spread the word, Solos to "test" the new stuff, and Corporates to bring in the big customers.

Example: "So how'd it go out there?" asks C-Proof, the team's MedTech.

"Not well. The first ten minutes were great—we were faster on the draw, quicker to find cover, and smoother on the delivery—but it went downhill fast. Midway through the rumble, Tony shot a ganger in the head. It killed him instantly, but Tony kept pluggin' away at him like he was going to get up again. He emptied his clip, reloaded, and started in again on the poor guy. Then Jacob started convulsing..."

Warning: this is not a good way to build a long-term campaign, because it is a high-risk occupation. The main drive of this approach is money. Drugs can make you very very rich, especially in 2020 when everyone is looking for an extra edge, but it can also kill you dead. If the drugs don't do it alone, the Cops and other fighters of the cause will, I guarantee it.

THE BIOWARE RESEARCHER

For all you technology buffs, this is the character for you! The researcher is an ex-corporate MedTech who has taken his skills and knowledge (sometimes secretly) from a corporation and decided to start his own practice. He is an expert in his field, and he has several innovative projects he's been working on to introduce new technology to the market. He is an Inventor like the Techie and an Entrepreneur like the Corporate, but his specialty is cybertechnology or biotech. A creative player can really have fun with this, too. What about a Skinweave that also functions as a disguise feature and changes your facial structure? What about nanotechnology that can identify the storage portions of the brain and copy data from someone without them knowing it? What about *CyberGeneration*? Your imagination is your limit. Just make sure the PC goes through trials and tribulations like the Streetsmart Inventor.

TRAUMA TEAM CENTRAL

If you have enough *M.A.S.H.* fans, a campaign focused on a Trauma Team response group can be lots of fun. The problem with this concept is that the team's pay can boil down to one single roll of a MedTechie. If he fails to save a client's life, the commission is lost and the team doesn't get paid anything extra for their services. Bad news. You can alleviate this by allowing MedTechies to try as a group, thereby receiving bonuses to their roll. A good response team is comprised of a Nomad (pilot), two Solos (bodyguards), and a few MedTechies (medical personnel). The drive of this campaign is the overwhelming number of emergency responses for the team, illustrating a truly dark future through the use of violence and its results. It's also good if you have a few trigger-happy players who don't understand the consequences of their violent actions. Of course, this is also a very depressing campaign because of the mass amounts of carnage seen by the team everyday.

REJUVINATING THE NETRUNNER

Hold up your hand if you have a PC Netrunner in your campaign. If it's up, you're a rare breed. I've met many *Cyberpunk* referees in my time, and I've rarely found one with a functional campaign that has a PC Netrunner. True, there are problems with integration and yes, the Netrunner rules are a lot to swallow at first, but the Netrunner is such an important character class it shouldn't be ignored. Here are a few ways to make for a smoother game.

PUT HIM IN THE FRONT SEAT

Normally, a Netrunner's power comes with the fact that he can strike anywhere, anytime, through cellular or landline modes of communication, do his dirtywork, and be gone without ever joining the team. You have to stop this. You have to put your hacker into the action, have him physically run with the team on their missions or operations. You can force him into doing so through a number of dirty (but effective) tricks.

Memory delay. Is your Netrunner making his runs long-distance? He might not know that all incoming data for the building is sent through a memory buffer (a physical piece of hardware) before moving on to any internal locations. Suddenly, mister Speedy Gonzales doesn't operate at the speed of his thought. He operates at a penalized initiative (let's say -5) during the entire netrun, and there ain't a thing he can do about it.

No external access. Hey, if there isn't a completely good reason why the building would be hooked into the Net at the time of intrusion, it won't be. It would be suicide for a company in 2020 to leave a door open like that. Looks like Speedy Gonzales has to get inside and access a terminal if he wants to deactivate the security grid.

FASTER, FASTER, FASTER!

How many times have you turned to work with your Netrunner and notice the other players stretch, yawn, and leave their seats? When a Netrunner is in the Net it's just like another character going out of town to do something: no one else is included. You HAVE TO SPEED THINGS UP in the game to keep the attention of your players. You can do this best in a cinematic combat style (see Craig's explanation in the Combat chapter for more) because you won't be tied to ensuring an ultra-realistic feel during play.

Be prepared for the Net. Pick up a crossword puzzle book and generate some standard datafortresses. It isn't hard, and it only takes a few minutes if you have the proper section of the *Cyberpunk* book in front of you. Jot down a few notes about IC programs and other essentials, then get your numbers in a row. Have the strength of all programs and their location on one piece of paper so that when it comes time to do battle all you have to do is roll a die and add it to the number. A little work on the front end will save you a lot of panic during a play session, believe me.

Improvise on the fly. If your Netrunner is doing something that you didn't expect, or if he's doing something that takes more complicated addition (juggling active and inactive programs with his demons while operating invisibly), toss out all the time-consuming math and have him make one quick Interface or Programming test to see if it worked. Forget number-crunching. Concentrate on turnaround time.

"She cannot go much faster, captain!" In the Net, information travels at the speed of light. Things happen incredibly fast. Just remember that your PC operates at the speed of thought. Granted, thought is still faster than that clumsy middleman known as your motor skills, but it's not dramatically faster. When the Netrunner is in the Net during combat, have him roll initiative with the rest of the party, adding his Interface to the roll. Allow him two actions at no penalty instead of one (to simulate the speed of thought) but no more. This will keep the whole scene moving much faster, especially if you're prepared for the combat.

Ultimately, you can extend the roles of a character by reexamining the special ability and invoking the question: "What else could I do with this?" Let this be law: judge not by the name of the character class, but by the special ability that governs it instead. If you follow this mantra you will eliminate the need to constantly create new character classes in the game (which, as we all know, is the way other roleplaying games think it must be done). Use what you have, and don't be afraid to improve upon it if it's not quite what you need. There is no need to rewrite or reengineer the system to fit the framework of a new character idea. There is, however, the freedom to stretch and squeeze things to help you run a better game. Good luck.

CYBERPUNK CAMPAIGNS: STREET OR SKYSCRAPER?

CHARLIE WONG—

The most common type of *Cyberpunk* campaign is one based around high-tech mercenary cyborgs doing things that are illegal, dangerous, and daring. Dark heroes bursting the bonds of an oppressive corporate state or riding the capitalist wave to the fullest, selling their talents to the highest bidder. This is the general frame of the basic *Cyberpunk* game and almost every player and GM has seen or run it. It's fun and exciting, but when it gets old, it's usually hard to find new and interesting avenues to explore.

It can be very hard to find new ways to play an old game. They always seem to boil down to, or gravitate towards, black-clad elite professionals. These games are trapped in the power of the cliché. *Cyberpunk* started vibrant and imaginative. It was a new approach to dystopian future fiction because it combined the dark future with wild energy and immoral greed. Dystopia was no longer limited to mindless obedience and oppressive control. *Cyberpunk* was a growing, moving, emotional masterpiece of a sleek and chaotic world. It was a vision of a wild and free future. Horrible only because it reflected the corruption and selfishness of the decade it was started in.

Having diagnosed what might be your obstacle, how does one overcome it? If you are a natural at approaching things in novel and creative ways, you only need a story to work with. If you have a story, but no ideas on how to spice it up, you probably only need more world detail. Then again, you may need both.

STORY

Coming up with a new story can be tremendously difficult. *Cyberpunk* lends itself very easily to elite black-ops team stories and seems to gravitate in that direction whatever the

story. Whether you want to resist this as the GM is up to you. Before you can stray from your theme and story though, you need a theme and story. There are generally two ways to come up with a new type of *Cyberpunk* game. The first is emulation and the second is cliché analysis.

EMULATION

Thousands and thousands of stories exist on tape and in books that can be used as source material for a *Cyberpunk* campaign. If the plot premises of these stories were good enough for their audience, they may be good enough for you. Emulating is basically mimicking an idea style. The stories you emulate don't have to be science fiction, futuristic or dystopian. They don't even have to be fictional. All they have to be is interesting to you.

Consider the *Twilight Zone* story "Terror at 50,000 Feet" where a man with acrophobia is terrorized by a creature ripping up the plane he is flying in. Of course nobody else sees it and nobody believes his screaming. He is the only person who can kill the monster. Involve the players in a conspiracy concerning new kinds of cyberassasins. They encounter these weird new hitmen and women and have to stop/join them.

Emulating doesn't mean copy an idea word for word, plot-twist by plot-twist. Pick and choose what you want, tailor it to your game, then use it to start your game. Once the ball is rolling, use the fresh start as a springboard to take your game far beyond the original story being emulated. For example:

The Hobbit is a story about a group of Solos who hire a Fixer to help them scout areas and steal important items or information. Along the way they meet a booster gang called the "Orcs" and acquire high-tech new weapons. They capture the mountain military base and the wage a war against the rival corporations that want a piece of the base and its valuable contents. All this is, of course, managed by a mysterious old Corporate with a lot of powerful connections.

SEARCH AND DESTROY CLICHÉS

The second way to find a story is to figure out what's been done before or too often. It is effective but time-consuming. It requires that one scrutinize the old story and campaign setting, find out what ways the game hasn't gone, then going them.

A group of characters has done every black-op and dirty deed in the book. The GM scrutinizes the game and decides that there hasn't been enough diplomacy lately. One day a case of mistaken identity drags one of the characters into a management position in a large corporation. The real manager is dead, killed in a hang-gliding accident. The real corporate had an important deal only he could make this week so the company offers to pay the PC to impersonate him. Little does the PC know how sinister the manager was. By the time the funny business starts to show itself, the PC has already pocketed the money and has no choice but follow through. These are not problems that can be handled with guns and everyone is looking the PC's way for orders.

DETAILING

If the problem with the campaign is not the story but the flavor, consider adding detail to the world and NPCs. By creating new and different places and people, new flavor and life can be infused into a game. Often the game becomes more memorable and fun if details that excite or hook the imagination are added. Situations may even become so vibrant that they almost run themselves.

NPCs

Some say that as much work should be put into each major NPC as a good *Cyberpunk* character. Background, motivation, character flaws and habits, all might be considered. Think about the history that makes that NPC who she is. What are the reasons for her actions and choices besides moving the story? Does she have a short temper or is she careless? What other flaws might

she have? Does she have any identifying habits like chewing nicotine sticks or playing with her bangs? What is her voice like and does she have an accent?

When detailing NPCs, think about all the little things that make that character more real. Compare them to real people and see if they are believable or if they're cardboard. Give them a soul along with their body.

ORGANIZATIONS & COMPANIES

What are the group entities of your world? *Cyberpunk* offers a wide range of companies and groups for your players to get mixed up with. Yet it's up to you to make these groups live in your campaign.

Certain groups have their own particular flavors. This more than just a theme, which is a superficial manifestation of the group's soul. What are the feelings, attitudes and methods that permeate the organization? Do they have a certain uniform, or handshake, or tradition? Every group approaches problems in different ways with differing levels of organization, zeal, logic and effectiveness. What makes your groups tick?

CITIES

Consider very carefully where the players are and how it will or won't affect them. Cities have personalities and methods just like NPCs and organizations. Think about how the city or building or vehicle will interact with different characters.

Different characters interact with their surroundings in different ways. Ever notice how some of you friends or maybe even you just seem to attract weird and frightening people or situations? In your game, you might anthropomorphize that kind of coincidence as the city not liking or toying with a character. It's up to the GM whether or not the city or wherever really is like that but the result is that characters will have a certain karma in relation to certain places. Consequently, a certain flavor of person or event will happen to them in those areas.

Looks

As long as you can see it, it looks like something. What do things in your campaign look like? What a character, company, gang or city looks like can be as influential as who and what they really are. Before, we described things to think about that might give your campaign elements more of a soul. Things that give your game wind, fire, life and all that kind of stuff. But what something is under the surface can be totally different from what it looks like.

Looks go hand in hand with the soul of the element you are detailing. They say that form follows function. You may want to consider how far one's look is from its true demeanor. An antiseptic corporate community might have a thriving black-market and underground community. Is that man in the suit really a powerful corporate or just someone trying to get noticed? Then again, sometimes a cold-blooded Solo is just a cold-blooded Solo.

Benjamin Wright—

Style = Substance

We orchestrate holy wars between corporate churches and technocrat philosophers. We send commandos to rescue political prisoners. We lead narcotics dealers on bloody quests for vengeance. What in the world could we have in common?

Cyberpunk. We referee the roleplaying game of the dark future, which is as multi-faceted as the the world upon which it is based—ours. One of the beautiful things about *Cyberpunk* is that it is similar enough to our own world to be immediately familiar; we can therefore take familiar ideas and transfer them to a *Cyberpunk* setting without having to reclassify every element. Imagine, for a moment, how easy (even inviting) it would be to make the famous film *Die Hard* into a *Cyberpunk* adventure—almost nothing would need to be changed. Just throw in some cyberlimbs, change the names of the characters and draw a few maps and

you're set. What's more, imagine what John McClane could have accomplished if he'd had a Netrunner with him!

This characteristic familiarity is what makes 2020 so multi-dimensional—*Cyberpunk* adventures can follow muggers or stockbrokers from the streets to the sky-scrapers. However, the variety of campaign styles may not be immediately obvious to all referees. The traditional adventure usually follows this model: a group of freelancers, skilled in illegal activities, are called together by a powerful patron who hires them to perform some kind of extraction. The freelancers research their target and then perform the extraction (be it of data, wares or personnel), and are then betrayed by their patron. Chaos ensues, and the freelancers are lucky if they escape with their lives. Sound familiar?

There can be much more to *Cyberpunk* than this. Although the adventure model given above is not by any means wrong or unenjoyable, it is rather typical. Those *Cyberpunk* referees who wish to break out of the mold, and those players who would like their referee to do so, will find many opportunities; campaigns in the 21st century can have many different styles. A campaign's style is dictated by several key elements—its orientation, scale, setting, morals, technology, violence and eventual goals are all determining factors.

The broadest factors in determining a *Cyberpunk* campaign's style are shared by absolutely every roleplaying game. The issues of orientation and scale are common to every game, be they fantasy or science fiction. Even if they are not considered beforehand, these two ideas define a campaign at its most basic level. Understanding these concepts gives the referee a strong foundation upon which he can build his campaign. So what exactly are they?

Orientation

Orientation is what the referee focuses his attention on the most when he creates his campaign. There are really only two possibilities for a campaign's orientation: the story and the characters. When running a campaign, a referee will work the adventures around one or these subjects. The

referee will constantly be thinking, "How will I fit the players into this part of the story," or "What will I do to the characters next?" When a campaign is story-oriented, the referee creates a story first and then tries to work the characters into it, while in a character-oriented campaign, the referee figures out the characters first and then tries to come up with stories for them to participate in. At the risk of seeming overly critical of both options, in story-orientation the referee's work comes first and in character-orientation the player's work (the creation of their characters) comes first.

There is a third possibility, which is to create a campaign which is equally character- and story-oriented. To achieve this, the referee must first sit down and decide what he wants his campaign to be about (see Topic 1). After coming up with a rough plotline and its character requirements, the referee has the players create characters which fulfill the plotline's requirements. This method ensures that during the course of campaigning the referee will not have to fit the story to the characters or vice-versa. Equal orientation is the optimum choice for any campaign, but unfortunately it is not always an option—players and referees can seldom afford to be so well-synchronized.

Scale

Scale is another universal element in campaign stylization. Whether your game is prehistoric or multidimensional, its scale will always have the last say in what can happen. Scale defines the potential limits of the campaign; the character's ability to influence their environment and the relative importance of the story's events are part of the scale. In *Cyberpunk*, the scale can be as small as the activities of a neighborhood protection gang to the machinations or corporate CEOs. The "standard" cyberpunk adventure (the previously mentioned freelance extraction) is rather moderate in its scale—although the results of the characters' actions could change the balances of global power (if they were stealing cloning technology from one corporation to another), the immediately palpable fallout of the characters' direct

involvement is rather well-contained. Generally, they will kill several people, cause some respectable property damage and cost somebody a good deal of money. However, they will not be personally overthrowing nations or anything of that magnitude.

The rule of thumb in setting a campaign's scale is this: if any typical character could perform the actions required of the story, then the scale is rather small-time. However, if only very particular characters could achieve the goals of the campaign, then the scale is increasingly large. For example: any number of streetsmart tough-guys could serve as a neighborhood protection gang, but only a very few elite power-brokers could dictate the policies of the megacorporations. A *Cyberpunk* referee should try to settle on a scale before play begins (agreeing upon a scale with the players is even better, but not always a possibility). Think about whether the player-characters will be changing the world, their nation, their city, their street, or their wallpaper. No scale is better or worse than any other, but the referee should try to choose a scale and stick with it.

SETTING

After the universal elements of orientation and scale and established, the next step is to establish the campaign's setting. This is, quite simply, where the players will be during the course of the campaign. The traditional setting for *Cyberpunk* campaigns is urban. More particularly, the majority of *Cyberpunk* campaigns take place in and around Night City. There is nothing wrong with this—*Cyberpunk* is primarily an urban game, and Night City has an abundance of source material and is well-populated with NPCs. However, since *Cyberpunk* is concerned with Earth approximately 25 years from now, the possibilities for campaigns settings are as varied as there are places to visit today. Since these possibilities are too numerous to individually address, consider instead the different ranges within these settings; a campaign could take place within one city, one region, one country, or across the whole world. Each range has many variations.

A single-city campaign could occur in a real city like Washington DC or in a fictional one such as New Galveston, off the coast of Texas (see *Home of the Brave*). A regional campaign could cover the entire East coast or traverse the Sahara Desert. A national campaign could occur in all of Australia, or could cover the many countries in continental Europe (such as *Eurotour*). A campaign could occur all over the globe and, like the prototypical cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*, could even leave the ground and reach into space. Cam-

paigning in space is a somewhat drastic departure from the previous settings, because space is almost completely alien to us (much more so than a foreign country). However, new settings offer fantastic new roleplaying possibilities. Other unconventional settings include desolate settings like post-apocalyptic no-man's lands, isolated pockets of wilderness such as South American nature preserves, and the virtual wonderlands of the potentially-infinite Net. These settings are less familiar to seasoned *Cyberpunk* players and referees, and may provide fresh avenues of adventuring and roleplaying.

No matter what the setting, *Cyberpunk* campaigns have certain characteristics which are considered necessary—but are actually mere conventions. These "earmarks" include particular climates with regard to morality, technology and violence. The traditional *Cyberpunk* adventure mentioned before exemplifies most 2020 campaigns; it's very short on morality, heavily focused on technology and packed with ultraviolence. This sort of climate is the most familiar, expected style for *Cyberpunk* campaigns, but this is not the only way to fly. Take a look at the dozens of cyberpunk-genre novels that have been written over the past 10 years—they vary widely in their style and climate. In terms of running a campaign in the dark future, always try to start the broadest parameters and work down to the specifics. That way, the details of your adventures will match the style of your campaign world.

MORALITY

The most general aspect of a campaign's climate is the relative applicability of the concept of "morality." Traditionally, *Cyberpunk* games are vicious, bloodthirsty and anarchistic. Such a moral climate is perfect for a campaign which follows the activities of a Boostergang or a bunch of Black Lace dealers. However, a campaign which places all the players in the upper echelons of the corporate elite will need a different take on morality; the players would not necessarily need to be "good guys," but neither could

they not get away with carrying a chainsaw and daring everyone to give them a reason to use it. Depending upon the preferences of the players and the referee any moral climate can work, but the most workable choices are Amoral, Tough, Desperate and Heroic.

Of the four choices, Amoral is the most liberating. This is because the players (and the referee) are unfettered by such things as conscience, fear or weak stomachs. Big guns, big knives and long nights of torture abound. Anarchy rules the day, and there are no Good Guys—there are just the Bad Guys and the Worse Guys. Amoral campaigns usually follow the exploits of boostergangs, drug dealers, mob enforcers and crooked cops. Black ops teams and edgerunners usually play in a Tough environment, where characters usually obey the law (or at least bend it rather than breaking it) and stay cool...unless someone pays them or gets in their faces. Tough is the "classic" *Cyberpunk* morality, and it is very appealing because it allows the characters to feel superior to the opposition ("Yeah, I gutshot him, but he was gonna drop Barbara into the toxic waste pit! What would you have done?"). Tough campaigns leave room for brutality, but they stop short of the rape-pillage-burn mindset of Amoral games.

For those referees and players who want something new in their *Cyberpunk* campaigns, try something really unconventional—have some morals! Desperate and Heroic campaigns deal with characters who actually want to do the right thing (although their means and methods may sometimes be questionable). Desperate campaigns throw the players into situations which they may want no part of—usually, the characters are law-abiding (or seemingly so) people who are thrown together by circumstance and must work together to survive and restore their lives. Running from the law and trying to survive in an unfamiliar environment are the main focuses of Desperate campaigns (movies like *The Fugitive* and *Judgement Night* come to mind). The problem with Desperate campaigns is that players may become frustrated at

their lack of agency in directing the plot—they may feel that they cannot act, only react (in truth, no campaign should work this way, and if it does then it is the fault of the referee for herding his players too much). The moral climate which gives the players more control over the campaign's events is the Heroic style. In such campaigns, the players have certain goals that they try to achieve without doing "bad" things ("bad" is open to interpretation, of course). Police and Media campaigns can often fall under the category of Heroic campaigns, and Rockers often fight for some kind of change for the better. Eco-terrorists, although branded by society as wrong, are actually struggling to do good, and are therefore quite Heroic.

Whatever moral climate is chosen, the players should never be forced to conform to strict definitions of morality. Roleplaying is foremost in any campaign, and characters should be free to change their minds and act unexpectedly. However, referees have an easy method for controlling how much leeway the players have in their actions: the law. If a referee wants the players to "be good," the capabilities of the police can be amplified to make them something to really worry about; if the referee wants an Amoral campaign, the police should be a joke—riddled with corruption, underfunded and unmotivated. Although the relative legality of the characters' actions can be used as a control over the morality, it does not always have to be (consider the Eco-terrorist example again, or think about the possibility of characters who operate above the law—like elite corporates). Referees must always be flexible, because no player will ever follow a script.

TECHNOLOGY

The technological climate of a *Cyberpunk* campaign must be given the same careful consideration as its moral climate. Since the concept of Technoshock is so central to *Cyberpunk* as a whole (see *The View From the Edge* in the basic rulebook), the referee's grip on the availability, capabilities and ramifications of new technology

is paramount to campaign cohesion. Artificial Intelligence, nanotechnology, cloning and virtual reality are all possible in 2020, but the rulebook leaves the details of such emerging technologies to the referee. This allows more freedom in establishing a personalized gaming environment, but some referees desire more background on these areas. Since *Cyberpunk* leaves such background to the referee, it is a responsibility of the referee to establish the technological climate of his campaign.

"Classic" *Cyberpunk* campaigns feature a great deal of cyberware and advanced virtual reality, while AI, nanotech and cloning are less common. In other words, *Cyberpunk* is typically high-tech. However, low-tech and supertech environments can provide new avenues of roleplaying. Some referees run their campaigns up to 30 years later than 2020, thereby working in beam weapons, sentient robots, vat-grown androids and extraterrestrial colonies. An interplanetary Cyberpunk campaign is quite easily achieved when the *Hardwired* and *Deep Space* supplements are liberally mixed with a good imagination. However, some referees haphazardly throw all sorts of new technologies into their 2020 games without considering the consequences. Remember: technology does not exist in a vacuum. Military technology trickles down to the private sector rather quickly in the dark future: INT 18 backpack combat-AIs can soon lead to pocket AI secretaries, and magnetic fields which repel bullets can be developed into traffic speedtraps and anti-gravity boots. What's more, there are always social implications to new technologies: if a cybermodem were invented which allowed two or more people to jack into each others' minds, what would this do to traditional concepts of love and privacy? Beware the Uncharted Tech Curve, referees!

The technological climate can also be reduced from that of "classic" *Cyberpunk*—many referees would consider this more drastic than higher-tech campaigns, since technology is such a vital part of the genre. However, when the availability of such advanced technologies is reduced, players must rely on their own initiative and wits rather than on gadgets and gimmicks. Low-tech *Cyberpunk* campaigns are usually about equal to the present in terms of scientific achievements; a Nomad campaign which took place mostly in the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico would see very little in the way of AI, Nanotech or other such wizardry. Such a game could even devolve to the tech level of *The Road Warrior*, with a rusty cyberware or two thrown in for familiarity. Truly ambitious referees might even try an "alternate history" Cyberpunk game set in the 1990's, with familiar corporations like McDonalds and GE always showing up and cybernetics being top-secret innovations as in *The Six Million Dollar Man*. For a true brain-bender, imagine a Cyberpunk 1940s campaign! By taking film-noir classics such as *The Maltese Falcon* or *Casablanca* and mixing in clunk-tech cybernetics and computers, referee and players alike would go where no edgerunner has gone before!

VIOLENCE

One place that almost every *Cyberpunk* player has been before is to a fight. Conflict and struggle are integral elements to any *Cyberpunk* campaign, but this does not necessarily mean that violence has to be omnipresent. Some referees or of the opinion that conflict and combat are the same thing, but there are other expressions of conflict. The climate of violence is a very important factor in determining the overall style of a campaign. The referee should have an idea of how violent he wants his game to be: he may want every session to end in a huge explosion, or he may want a lone handgun to shake up his players. Some referees want each player to have an FN-RAL, while other referees consider rifles "heavy weaponry" and keep most fights at the fists and knives level.

There are essentially three levels of violence which may characterize a *Cyberpunk* campaign: it may be common, problematic or rare. In games where violence is common, players can expect to get in at least one gunfight per session and the police will only be expected if buildings start coming down. This is a very cynical type of campaign, where even grandmas are going to pack 12mm autos and the characters will not feel threatened by anything less than an ACPA suit. Although the actual level of chaos may vary, common violence is the most typical style of *Cyberpunk* violence. Despite this trend, some Cyberpunk referees prefer a somewhat lower-firepower environment, one where violence is not unheard of but is still problematic—the characters are usually armed (but seldom heavily), and combat is an obstacle to be dealt with rather than a goal to be reached or a means of having fun. This method is an excellent choice, because it has room for combat (which most players enjoy once in a while) but maximizes roleplaying by encouraging players to work around combat rather than shoot through it. Still, some campaigns are geared towards minimal violence (if not nonviolence), such as corporate boardroom dramas and Net-oriented virtual quests. These campaigns resolve their conflicts in other ways, with betrayal, humiliation, battles of wills and complex schemes taking the place of headshots and hand grenades. It all depends on the referee's plans for the campaign and the desires of the players.

GOAL

Along with pinning down all the stylistic points, the referee and players should try to agree on some kind of goal for the campaign—a goal will do a great deal to give the campaign its own unique "feel." Most *Cyberpunk* campaigns use either profit or survival as the goal, but revolution, power, war, ratings and enlightenment are all potential goals today and in 2020. The goal must be suited to the other parameters of the campaign (such as scale, technology, etc) and vice versa. With the stylization of a campaign completed, the plot and characters can be united in a cohesive whole. To illustrate this idea, several sample campaign styles have been listed below. If you like one, feel free to build on it or change and then have a blast!

SOME SAMPLE CAMPAIGNS & THEIR STYLES

CAMPAIGN: "CYBERSPACE—THE FRACTAL FRONTIER"

The player-characters are all Netrunners, each with a specialty such as programming, technical support, offense, defense, etc. They are a Net-based team of troubleshooters who are hired by the assorted corporations to deal with computer security, virtual vandalism, data espionage and AI support. Through their jobs, they make a discovery: AIs are made by stealing human minds...

Orientation: Equally-oriented; the team is central to the story's progression.
Scale: Medium; highly skilled characters whose actions have important consequences.
Setting: The Net; the city or cities they operate from is less important.
Morality: Tough; the characters aren't vicious and the team is legally licensed.
Tech: Standard high-tech; AIs are uncommon and expensive.
Violence: Rare; most of the "combat" occurs in the Net.
Goal: Profit; later the characters will have to deal with their discovery.

CAMPAIGN: "THE DEUS CYCLE"

The player-characters are high-powered employees (Corporate, Techie, Netrunner, Charismatic Leader, etc) of the newly-popular corporate church, Digital Divinity Inc. DDI's resident deity, Deus, is mysterious and perhaps untrustworthy. As the PCs attempt to further DDI's success, do they work with Deus, or against it?

Orientation: Equally-oriented; the story and the characters are directly linked.
Scale: Small; those outside DDI may never know what goes on in the campaign.
Setting: The World; the characters are jet-setters and DDI is multi-national.

Morality: Amoral; the corporation is concerned with their own internal conflict.
Tech: Supertech; the characters are corporate elite in a cutting-edge corporate church.
Violence: Problematic; fighting comes up in the form of corporate/religious competition.
Goal: Power; the PCs want to help DDI and must deal with Deus one way or another.

CAMPAIGN: "RAINFOREST RAIDERS"

The player-characters are ecoterrorists who operate out of Rio, funded by a rich and eccentric nature freak. A retired Agricorp executive, he is trying to make up for his past sins by funding the players to get the corps out of the rainforest.

Orientation: Equally-oriented; the characters are necessary to progress the story.
Scale: Large; the characters are almost alone, struggling to help the environment.
Setting: South America; from bustling cities to the densest forests.
Morality: Heroic; the characters do a lot of damage, but for a good cause.
Tech: Low-tech; the characters are jungle guerillas in third-world countries.
Violence: Common; the players spend a lot of time sabotaging corporations.
Goal: Revolution; the characters want to save the rainforest.

CRAIG SHEELEY—

THE EDGE IS WHERE YOU WANT IT

The scope of any campaign is one aspect that every gaming referee has to confront. How big does the campaign get? How much power do you let the player-characters have? Where do you draw the line?

Cyberpunk is no exception. The game began as a world of streetpunks armed and outfitted with cast-off and slightly-improved 20th century technology, where "the Edge" was a few crude cybernetics and a lot of attitude. As time progressed (and *Cyberpunk 2020* was made available), the technology kept improving and expanding, as technology will, and the amount of background information also exploded with the corporation and city sourcebooks. Now, cyberpunks have a vast arsenal of weapons, technology, and information at their disposal, and a whole world (as well as orbital space) to play in.

With expanded resources comes the temptation to fully exploit those resources. Mike Pondsmith writes in *CyberGeneration* that "We created a great world in *Cyberpunk*, a world full of film noir romance, double-crossing bad guys, stylish killers, and disaffected, cynical heroes...(but then) The average Edgerunner character began to profile like this: a mid-twenties to thirties professional...armed to the teeth with high-tech cyberware, milspec weapons, aerodynes and body armor. He had a pocket full of euro to finance his bad habits, and a web of connections wide enough to awe the Amazing Spiderman ...

As *Cyberpunk* began to spread out to players around the world, the emphasis began to center on guns, big vehicles, and large power-plays that encompassed whole nations. Okay, it may have been the Edge, but it wasn't the Street."

Just because *Cyberpunk* has a lot of information and technology doesn't mean that every referee has to use all of it. The campaign Mike describes sounds like the old "Monty Haul" syndrome, named after dungeon crawls of the late '70s where so many rewards and treasures were available at minimal risk that the adventure more closely resembled a game show than an epic adventure, with referees who would practically give the stuff away.

Managing any campaign is up to the referee. Although every campaign changes with time and player-character development, it is up to the referee to make sure that the campaign is at the level of power that he wants. If the ref-

eree wants a corporate-infighting campaign with all the trappings and benefits of power, so be it. If the referee wants a street campaign where the characters struggle for daily survival, good. If the referee wants a campaign where the player-characters are practically super secret agents, with oodles of cyberware, high-tech weapons, big-kill vehicles, powered armor, and international significance, fine. It's his choice! All three are the Edge, from the high and mighty to the low and filthy. The Edge is an attitude. It's more than just the will to survive, it's the will to survive and improve, clawing one's way up to power. In a way, mankind is the Edge; we're the only species on the planet that strives to do better than mere survival.

MAINTENANCE OF POWER

The trick to managing any campaign is to keep the power level where you're comfortable. Every *Cyberpunk* campaign style has simple guidelines for this:

THE STREET

Basic survival, aimed at getting off the Street! Or at least rising above it. The first thing to do is to keep characters poor—make them spend precious money on food, clothing, shelter. Make rewards small or precarious; give them enemies who steal their money, their possessions, their treasures. Be sure that the characters never see any of the expensive tech or at least never get their hands on it (such stuff can make good rewards to make them go on suicidal adventures). For instance, they know about powered armor—Arasaka suits stomped through the neighborhood last night, shadowed by AVs and armored cars. Try and put the grab on one? No way! At this level, enemies are gangs and other street trash—the characters are beneath corporate notice and are rabble targets at best. Emphasize the grinding poverty and depressing environment. Player-character goals: To get out of this place!

PROFESSIONAL

This is where a lot of *Cyberpunk* games start, with characters as free-lance pros, fairly well-equipped and skilled. Remember to harp about living quarters, where and what the characters eat, health costs, etc.—the basics of life. Keep material rewards well in hand—a 'punk with 10,000 euro is a 'punk with too much money. The characters are messing with the big leagues now, and they have big-league enemies...Medical bills and major ammo costs go hand in hand, as they are worthy of corporate notice and tend to attract major heat. Major tech is still out of their reach, as is real temporal power; keep it that way. And if they do obtain such goodies, make sure they have enemies who'll crush them before they get too big. Remember, the player-characters are still just individuals, and have no real chance against the power of even a small corporation.

THE MILITARY CAMPAIGN

Or the Cop campaign, or anything else where the player-characters are wearing a uniform and taking orders. Keeping control here is absolutely simple: the characters may have all sorts of fun hardware and power to play with, but they also have superiors who tell them when, where, and how to use it. Use it wrong once too often, and the characters end up on the wrong side of their own toys...

CORPORATE

The corporate campaign concentrates on the fun of inter-corp infighting, back-stabbing, boot-licking, and trying to climb the corporate ladder on the backs of one's colleagues (this also includes the organized crime campaign). Sure, the average corporate has the ability to wield more power than even the most powerful street-punk, but also has more enemies watching for a single mistake, a single opening where they can put that knife firmly into player-character backs. Here, the penalties for failure are crippling, while the rewards for success are marginal ("Good work, Johnson!"). If you want to see just how slimy your players can get, this is the campaign.

The points to remember are 1) No matter how powerful your player-characters become, there is always someone more powerful than they are. 2) The more power your player-characters accumulate, the more enemies they attract. 3) As your player-characters accumulate power, they find that they have to spend more time, effort, and money maintaining that power. Make them work to obtain it, then make them work twice as hard to keep it!

The Edge is where you, the referee, want it.

DIFFERENT CAMPAIGN STYLES

Cyberpunk concentrates a lot on the basic urban streetpunk-edgerunner campaign. As Mike Pondsmith says in *Cybergeneration*, "[Cyberpunk was]...a world full of film noir romance, double-crossing bad guys, stylish killers, and disaffected, cynical heroes..." That's where the main thrust of the game has been, reinforced by such wonderful supplements as the *Night City* sourcebook, *Solo of Fortune*, *Rockerboy* and *Wildside*. But the mean streets of the city are only a small part of the vast world of 2020. There's a whole lot of territory beyond the city limits.

Tired of the concrete jungle? Looking for other places to play, other climes to conquer? Then try a *Cyberpunk* campaign in an alternate locale, with an alternate campaign bias.

The campaign styles below work best with the player-characters acting as a team: a workshack or spacecraft crew in space, a nomad gang, or a military unit.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

The supplement *Deep Space* introduces an entirely alien environment to the world of *Cyberpunk*. In fact, it gets you off the world entirely! In space, codes of behavior are different, character goals are vastly modified, and the emphasis is on role-play rather than combat. Space is a combat-hostile environment, a fact both the original *Near Orbit* and *Deep Space* hammer home at every opportunity. You really don't want to shoot an

accidental bullet through your habitat wall. At very least, you'll lose some atmosphere and make a lot of people angry with you. At worst, you'll lose your life, and possibly kill other people aboard the habitat. Not good. In space, you'll concentrate more on dirty hand-to-hand tricks in zero-gravity (or micro-gravity, which might as well be the same thing for clumsy humans) to settle fights. Guns are things used by ground-pounders and flatlanders (people from Earth), sloppy sods who take too many things for granted.

Rather than limiting the adventure, removing combat as a viable way of settling differences opens up a window of role-play opportunity. Humanity in space is beset by the same problems as terrestrial humanity: love, war, politics, survival. Spacers love, hate, fear, envy, and suffer from other emotional problems; they may have escaped Earth's gravity, but they can't escape the products of millions of years of evolution.

Adventure possibilities include covert corporate warfare, rivalries between work crews, space disasters and other extra-atmospheric threats (imagine being separated from your workshack's radiation shelter when you know there's a solar flare due), and the constant "cold war" between the USAF and the ESA/Neo-Soviets.

NOMADS/PIRATES

As has been stated in *Home of the Brave*, there are a lot of nomads roaming the highways and waterways of North America, and their lifestyles are a lot different than that of the average cyberpunk—for one thing, they have a decent education. For another thing, they have a real family life, complete with love, affection, companionship, and a real childhood (with friends, play, schooling, and other childish activities). They also face a lot of enemies—the corporations who don't agree with their lifestyle, goals, and independence, gangs who envy and desire the things that the nomads have, governments who resent the nomads' freedom.
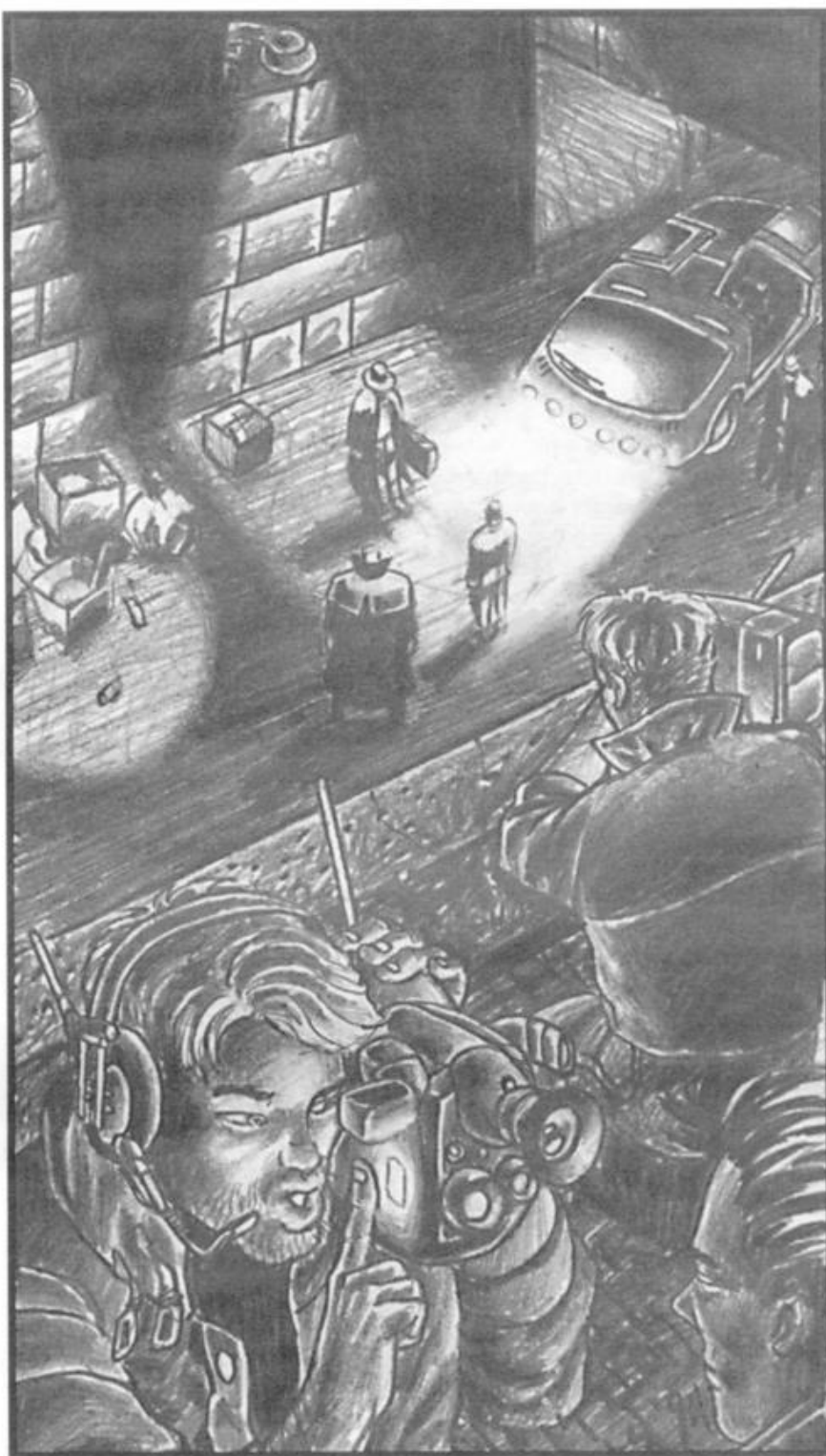
The nomad campaign offers a lot of opportunity for fast action, lots of vehicle chases and combats, political intrigue, and corporate conflicts, but with a distinct "us versus them" flavor of carrying the nomad torch in a hostile world. The advantages are the concentration on role-playing—living among nomads is a lot more secure and safe than living in the urban jungle, so you don't have to worry about survival as much—and the opportunity to have a lot more support and camaraderie than the average lonely cyberpunk. Remember, no nomad is truly alone.

MILITARY/MERCENARY

All right, maggots! Get your butts in line and ready for inspection RIGHT NOW! Move it, move it, move it! If the world of *Cyberpunk* is flash, style, and attitude, then the world of the military is drudgery, boredom, and obedience, with occasional periods of outright insanity called war. Definitely one of the team styles of play, the military/mercenary campaign tone differs from the overriding insistance on style over substance that marks the typical urban *Cyberpunk* campaign. Here, the characters are part of a larger organization that tells them where to go, what to do, and how to do it. In return, the characters are given really fun and destructive toys to use on the job. Like the nomad campaign, the characters are allowed more time for role-play, because their day-to-day lives are more secure than a streetpunk's, and because military relationships are more intense than the typical street relationships—when the supply sergeant takes a dislike to you, it's more serious than crossing a major corporation!

The military campaign makes for a definite framework, too. Routine and drill are an integral part of all military life, so these elements can be brought into play. Discipline and obedience to orders help limit anarchic player actions, as well as causing friction (and fostering role-play). And finally, few players can resist the opportunity to use the toys they're issued—this is the campaign for the players who want to play in the big leagues, with tanks and powered armor.

References for this style of campaign include lots of sci-fi military fiction (*The Mercenary*, *Hammer's Slammers*, *Starship Troopers*, etc.), a considerable amount of anime, and Atlas Games' *Chrome Berets* supplement. *Corporation Book 2* (Militech and Lazarus Group) has useful information on the two largest mercenary organizations in the world, *Home of the Brave* has information on the U.S. military, and *Maximum Metal* has all the dope on vehicles, powered armor, and how to kill each other in either.

ROSS "SPYKE" WINN—

CAMPAIGN STYLE

One of the most important elements in building a campaign is the definition of style. It usually changes how the story is perceived. Take *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, as an example.

Dracula (as a book) was written as gothic romance, much more than horror. The basic vampire story does not change. The ways in which it has been presented greatly affected how it was received. While some screen or graphic adaptations portray Dracula as an evil and horrific creature, the latest portrays him as Stoker intended; a tragic hero, tortured by loss of his true love. Faith in true love becomes his salvation. This is as much a romance in the gothic style as *Rebecca*, or any other example.

Defining your world in terms of style will change your players perception of the action, and enrich your role-playing experience.

BUILD YOUR OWN WORLD? YES, YOU CAN!

There is no rule that says that in *Cyberpunk 2020* you cannot create a play environment that mirrors any of the cyberpunk worlds in film, comics, or literature. RTG has done it for us in the WorldBooks (*Hardwired*, or *When Gravity Fails*). Ianus Games has released *Night's Edge*, for all you techno-horror types. You can tweak the rules and make yourself one, too.

A game could have flashback adventures to the Collapse and Reformation (1994 to 2008), or be in a new cyberpunk environment designed by the Referee. The InterLock™ system has proven itself to be very versatile; just read *Mekton*. A really determined Referee could even design a different genre for the system, but that is another book all to itself.

FEEL

What type of style defines the play environment? Is it Jazz, Punk, Film Noire, Anime? What styles define the play group? It is very important that they are compatible. If your players are only into Solos and Fixers, then a Media /Rocker social-resistance campaign is probably a bad idea.

FILM STYLES

Cyberpunk is a very visual genre. Because we live in technologically advanced society we can "see" the future. Movies permeate our culture, and there are some great cyberpunk movies out there. *Akira, Until The End Of The World, Blade Runner*, and the absolutely seminal *Max Headroom*, are only a few.

Film style can be important in visualizing a campaign. Since most game groups see and enjoy the same types of movies, the Ref can use descriptive elements from them. It is easier to visualize something from a common point of reference.

ANIME: ACTION, HEROISM, POWER, ROMANCE

Anime are a type of animated films from Japan. They are usually pigeon-holed by Americans as children's entertainment. Don't be fooled. In Japan, Anime is a billion-dollar industry. These films are written by, and for, adults.

There are even some live-action movies that have a definite Anime feel, especially *Total Recall*. Anime and most *Cyberpunk* games have a lot in common.

Action is absolutely necessary in Anime. All the action is for a purpose though. This is not senseless violence. Though much of it may be seen as excessive, there is always a reason for the action.

Characters are not usually gray in Anime. They are either Good or Evil. If the team is pitted against a Corporation, then the Corporation must have some massive scheme for taking over the Earth.
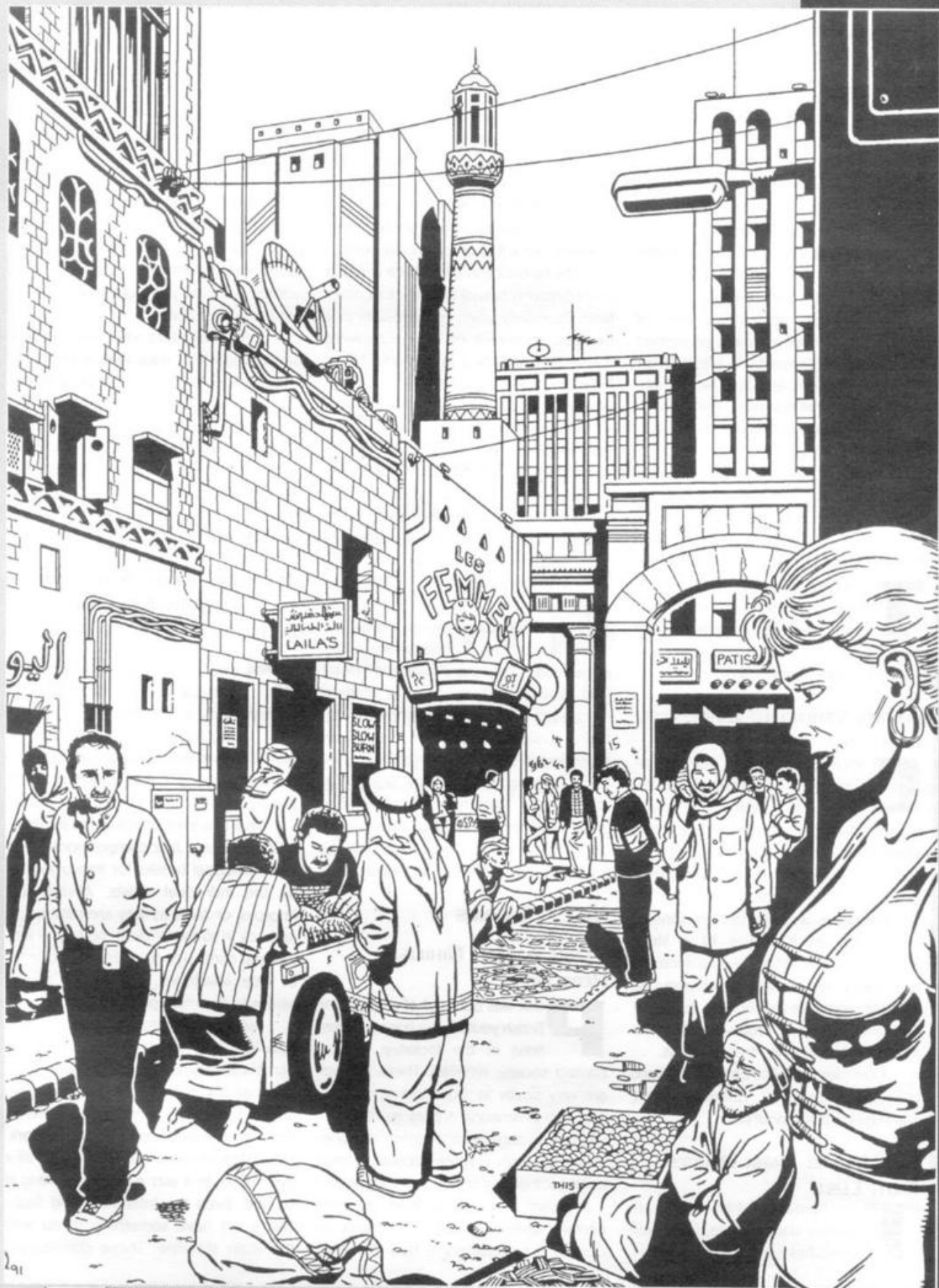
The players do everything in their power to prevent the death of innocent bystanders, most of the time. They may not always win, but our heroes usually tie.

Characters in an Anime game will usually be able to make significant changes in their world. They will be able not only to expose the Evil Corporation, but also to destroy it. Consequently their enemies will also have great power. To affect this great change (for the betterment of Mankind, of course), their lives are usually destroyed in some way.

Anime has absolutely tons of romance. Lost loves, ex-loves, unrequited loves, all types of loves. No player in an Anime should have less than two romantic relationships at one time. The old you-killed-my-love-so-I-will-avenge-them plotline is always a big hit.

Examples: *Akira, AD Police, Bubblegum Crisis, Appleseed, Ghost in the Shell, Cyber City Oedo 808.*

Night City 2020

The core campaign for *Cyberpunk* is most definitely an Anime feel. The conflicting motives and ideals of the average cyberpunk are usually those of the classic hero.

Cinema Verite: Realism, Romance

Cinema Verite is a very realist form. The characters are real people, with both positive and negative traits. There are no black and white characters in Cinema Verite, as there are none in real life. No one is good or evil, only human.

Romance is important in Cinema Verite only as it relates to a story. Romance here is not as much a necessity as a luxury. We are not talking about an idealistic romance either, this is reality. Romance will have problems, disagreements, and sometimes lousy endings.

Examples: *Until The End Of The World* (definitely cyberpunk), *Untamed Heart, The Fugitive,* and *GoodFellas.*

Film Noire: Dark Heroes, Grit, Lust

The heroes of Film Noire are usually dark heroes. Grey personalities so jaded by the realities of life that no perversion or act shocks them. They are usually half lost in drink when not on the job. Living on the edge of oblivion.

Film Noire usually takes place on the seamier side of town. It's a world of dirty windows, and shabby offices. A single light bulb hanging on bare wire, over a desk that has grooves for the tired detective's shoes. The single chair screams like a lost child, and he waits.

The romance in Film Noire is much more brazenly sexual than in most other films. Especially when you consider that the best examples of the genre were made in the forties and early fifties. Referees should be careful about using brazen sexuality in some play groups, especially younger ones. This is an area that most under the age of eighteen won't even be able to accurately understand. So tread carefully here.

Examples: *Casablanca, The Maltese Falcon, Blade Runner, Gilda.*

Don't Take My Word For It

Get out there and see this stuff. Even major video chains are carrying Anime in their science-fiction sections nowadays. Don't limit yourself too much, *The Maltese Falcon* is a much better example of Film Noire than *Blade Runner.* There are some great story ideas in movies that have nothing to do with Sci-Fi. Try *Oceans 11, The Thin Man* (absolutely great ideas for "Goldenkid" campaigns), *The Wild Bunch,* or *Dangerous Liaisons* for some really diverse story ideas.

Music Styles

Punk: Anger, Nihilism, Rebellion

Punk was born out of anger. Poor British youth in the late seventies, tired of the lockstep, rigidly-classed society, rebelled. These feelings are very similar to those that started the Jazz Age in America. A punk game is galvanized by anger and a feeling of hopelessness. Death is more acceptable than living another day settling for "your place."

Punks are also defined by their intense nihilistic streak. They seek to destroy the mechanisms by which they are to a great extent controlled. They are not very sophisticated, lashing out like children at the slightest provocation.

Punk is about wanting a different way. The Punks seek freedom and are willing to die for it. The adventure will be very set on the theme, very intense. Punk music is almost kinetic. It drives the players. Chases, hot pursuit, new enemies appear from all sides, and no player should ever be sure what happens next. In film this discordance of actions is called jump-cut. The shifts in tenor are very fast.

Punk characters will come from a background they want to see changed. They will rebel against class-systems just because they are there. It will be especially hard for players in Police, or Netrunning campaigns to be punk; in punk the players are rebelling against a system they really don't understand. These character roles have to understand the system just to function.

Jazz: Intricate, A Return To A Common Melody, Subtlety

Cool Jazz is a very intricate musical style. Instead of corners, a Jazz campaign should have spirals, and spirals within spirals. Sometimes these spirals form closed patterns, going back to where they started.

Jazz has a lot of solos and improvisation. In many Jazz compositions there are intentional breaks for improvisation by the individual artists. Always the Improvs, or Jams as they are called, spiral back in to the original melody. A jazz themed campaign may wander quite far in little interludes, but it will always return to the main plot.

Most of the variations and changes in a jazz flow will be very subtle. The players will not always immediately realize that the focus has changed. This subtlety requires a masterful Referee and very experienced players to work. Heavy-handedness will kill the flow of a jazz game. In a jazz game everything is related. Even the interludes and flashbacks will have something to do with the main storyline. These connections

may be subtle and sometimes lack focus, but they will exist. Not only must the Ref be masterful, so must the players. It is terribly easy to miss an important point or clue with this level of subtlety.

METAL: ROCK AND ROLL FOREVER! (WITH ERIC HEISSERER)

Metal is one of the purer Rock styles. It is not Blues-Rock, Folk-Rock, Or Rock-A-Billy. It is a straight-up, and in-you-face, kind of music. The message is there, right at the surface, for all the world to see. Metal has no spirals, only peaks and valleys. Driving the message home like hammer-blows.

A heavy metal style generally involves violence, rage, power, and speed. It can border on the psychotic at times. Heavy metal is not sneaky, quiet, or invisible. Metal jumps out at you and hits you in the face. The music is full of raw energy, which the characters can use like a drug to get that 'boost' stepping into a firefight or starting a mission. And when the lead is flying, a little boost can go a long way. Studies have shown that an individual's productivity can increase by listening to a preferred style of music. Why not apply this to *Cyberpunk* situations?

NIGHT CITY 2020

Night City is definitely a Metal campaign. Metal and Anime compliment each other nicely. The players see the world as a challenge, and the music is the message.

TECHNOLOGY DEFINING THE CAMPAIGN

What is the average/common technology of the game-world? What is the accessibility of that technology to the players? How prevalent is the technology of violence in society as a whole? Technology and its prevalence are important to the level of violence. The questions of violence and technology are important to a Referee especially if they are running outside the 2020 setting. Technology is the most important of these considerations. Technology is power.

THE NET

WE ARE HERE: Ø

We live in a cyberpunk world, right now. No, it's not the world of Gibson or Sterling, but we do live in an ever shrinking "global village." Our world is linked. The Net is in place and there are silicon cowboys out there stealing, right now. There are data fortresses and fixers, right now. We live in a world where cyberpunk is becoming a political, economic, and personal reality.

THE BEGINNING

The Net is the lowest level of technology where cyberpunk is possible. The perquisite technology is a global datanet, and a global law-enforcement network. We have these things in 1993. We also have computer viruses, pioneers who are "stealing" from big corporations, and a government we see as corrupt.

Violence is very personal in the Net age. For 99% of the people on the face of the Earth, we have to get close to do damage. Violent deaths are with knives or guns at close range. It is changing toward the later part of this period. Violence starts to become detached and invisible. It is the shape of things to come.

RUNNING

As a game style this is a good one for new Referees. There are huge possibilities for great campaigns in the Collapse and Reformation period in *Cyberpunk* History. It's easier for the Referee because they don't have to deal with the unbalancing effects of cyberware and biotech. Netrunning is also simplified, no one yet has direct interface, Ihara and Grubb are in high school. So the possibilities of Netrunning are foreshortened.

EXAMPLE:
Grendel peers around the corner into the dirty alleyway and spots them: three Black lace pushers arguing about rates. "Great ... a three-to-one ratio," he mumbles as he activates the RPH Metalhead chip in his Wearman and waits for the first track to break in. The song starts with a blazing percussion rhythm that courses through his blood and kicks his adrenaline into overdrive. The Ref decides that for the next couple rounds he has an initiative bonus of +1, as the music carries him. Just the edge Grendel needs to elvis the local streetscum...

SPYKE NOTE:
All you musical purists out there don't get upset with me. For my purposes Jazz is defined by the "Cool Jazz" of the 50's, prior to the Beat Poets. For those of you who want to there is Fusion, Ragtime, and about a thousand other Jazz styles; each with their individual flavor.

FLASHBACKS

It is sometimes a good idea to run the players through a flashback adventure. If some critical element of the story occurred in the past, then let the players play it. It does not even have to be their past. If the Netrunner accesses a data recording of an extraction attempt, let the characters be those people for a session. Interludes like these are a real key to keeping the game fresh, imaginative, and fun.

CYBERWARE: 2011 TO 2026

This is the age of Night City. The rise of Johnny Silver-hand, and the end of the Old World Order. It is a very exciting time. The possibilities for good are boundless; unfortunately so are the possibilities for evil.

RUNNING

Cyberware technology is usually where inexperienced Referees lose their grip. With two *Chromebooks*, and several other supplement's worth of options and cyberware running around loose, it is hard to keep track. The Referee has so much to deal with in terms of story, NPC's, and style that the players quickly become too powerful. One easy way for the Ref to deal with this is keeping the players poor. This does tend to get old quickly, so we'll talk about some other options in the Topic on GM Control.

The easiest way to control the "I want something illegal" phenomenon is to limit the purchases of cyberware the players make. Make the cyberware define some subplot element of the character. If players have to rationalize why they have this EMG-85 Railgun (and realize that any sound rationalization means a lot of angry people are looking for them) then the player may change some ideas about the character.

Violence is becoming less and less personal in the 2020's. As the Net has matured it has become possible to kill someone a world away—with a thought. Only Netrunners can do this now, but what will come next? Tactical displays and SmartGuns™ have made gunplay about as personal as Nintendo™.

NANITES: 2027+

True Nanites do not become viable until the mid-2020's. What early users call nanites are really tailored viruses. They are not true VonNeumann Machines. They do perform complex tasks, but do not yet make themselves, or heal. True Nanites are self-reproducing, self-repairing, molecular-sized programmable machines. Not tailored transform viruses that must periodically be replaced. What we are talking about is *CyberGeneration*.

The advent of *Maximum Metal* and *CyberGeneration* really brings to the forefront the probability of "Superheroic" campaigns, and characters. A large percentage of the population has access to technology that makes them "better" than the rest of humanity, at least qualitatively.

RUNNING

This is the stuff that dreams are made of. Cars that fix themselves, perfect little children. It is also true that the possibility for doing evil is staggering. Someone could engineer a meningitis that would destroy humanity in about thirty-days. Almost anything is possible, like magic.

VIOLENCE DEFINING THE CAMPAIGN

What is the level of violence in the society? What are the personal possibilities of violence for, or to, the players? The levels of violence, to a large extent, determine the "power-level" of the campaign. Ref's should tread carefully when allowing larger, and more dangerous weapons.

INDIRECT VIOLENCE

Whether or not the players have ready access to means of delivering death greatly changes the tenor of the whole campaign. Many games that revolve around Fixers and Corporates will not have direct violence. That is dirty work for the security NPC's. The players will know that the nod of a head, or the simple kiss can end a career. The best example of this kind of

cyberpunk is in literature. Read *Islands In The Net*, by Bruce Sterling. An extremely low-violence cinematic example is *Until The End Of The World*, directed by Wim Wenders.

DIRECT VIOLENCE

Direct violence is about the minimum for most *Cyberpunk 2020* Campaigns. Players have, and use, the ability to kill. It is still, even in 2020, a powerful thing to end a life. Killing should be roleplayed as the traumatic experience that it is, especially if this is the characters first use of deadly force.

Most *Cyberpunk* characters will have a lot of experience with direct physical violence. Without extensive previous use of deadly force (Solos, Cops, Nomads) some psychological trauma should be realized. Remorse over killing an old enemy, grief for ending a human life, something to reinforce in the player's mind what they have done.

This may sound a bit "hearts and flowers" for a *Cyberpunk* game. There is a reason behind this—roleplaying. The average Edgerunner in 2020 does deal with the possibility of death on a daily basis. So does the average person in 1990 America. It is the personal role in death that causes stress. Yes, the reaction will not be as severe in 2020. Yes, there is really more of a probability of death in 2020; but there should still be some reaction. Maybe not for the war-weary Solo; but definitely for the scared young Tech. There may be nightmares and remorse, but the character should be able to rationalize killing to stay alive.

ULTRAVIOLENT

Ultraviolence has been one of the main themes of cyberpunk literature. The dehumanization of people through the media is well handled in *The Artificial Kid*, and other works. This lack of social mores, and generally sanity, has led to the perception of people as so much meat. In *A Clockwork Orange*, Burgess uses ultraviolence to show the difference in the perceptions of man. All this violence has a purpose. It motivates the story. The changing way in which we see violence is a campaign theme in and of itself (see the sidebar).

POWER LEVEL DEFINING THE CAMPAIGN

There are two levels of power in a *Cyberpunk 2020* Campaign. The first is setting power. Setting power is the primary limiter of campaign power. Character power is an adjunct function. Using these two criteria it is easy to see the effects and affects of the character's actions. If a fairly average edgerunner does something on the street level, it may change the way business is done in that area. If the same Edgerunner does something on the national level, it may be just a ripple. The simple presence of a Hero or Superhero could change the course of events on the city level, and any deliberate actions effect "The Movement" nationally. Conversely, should characters on the street level get a hold of material or information that can effect national or international events (In *Land Of The Free* the players, who are a slightly above-average group of Edgerunners and lower-echelon heroes, have access to information that will change the whole of human society.) Then the balance of power is upset and one of two things must happen. Either the characters are thrust (and thrust with no preparation) into a high-powered arena that they may not have the skills to function in effectively; or they (usually) cease to exist.

SETTING POWER

Setting power is the arena in which the player-characters operate. In *Never Fade Away* the setting is obviously a National level. Silverhand is a National Media figure with all those attendant responsibilities of image and style. So is Alt Cunningham, even though much of her outward appearance is that of "just another pretty face." There are some slightly lower-powered characters in the adventure as well. Nomad Santiago is a fairly powerful force in his community, but his power does not reach as significantly into the cyberpunk world. His partner, Rogue, does have slightly more presence. The Media, Thompson, is on the threshold of being a major player, but not quite there. So these characters, making changes to their set-

ting level, need not be the same power and still be a good team. One thing is certain, the decisions they make will effect changes in the way things are perceived on a national level.

One last idea, the changes that the players make in their setting need not be self-evident. In many cases, like *Never Fade Away*, the changes will be subtle or unnoticed for a while. Some changes are mixed. Johnny Silverhand made the definitive Rocker statement at the Arasaka Riot in Night City. The change in Media perception was immediate, and obvious. The changes that Alt made, within the Net, would not be seen or recognized for as much as fifteen years. The Ref can make the decisions of change and magnitude in many cases; in others, it is the players that make the decision.

STREET

"The street finds its own uses for things" is the most quoted cyberpunk idea in the world. When William Gibson wrote that, he began the cyberpunk movement as a cohesive thing. It is an idea of the Street. Where technology runs head-on into the way you eat, sleep, and love. Cyberpunk is about the dehumanization of man, and the primordial urge to return to "humanity." We see these changes today. The "New Tribalism" as a reaction to the increasing level of technology of our society.

In 2020, the Street is where everything happens; it all begins, or ends, on the Street. The setting is usually limited to an area of a single city. The CZ of Night City, or the "Club Scene." Campaigns usually deal with lower-powered characters and small groups. A streetgang set, a local band, or a police precinct. The little revolutions that take place are smaller ideas. A local network to hide unjustly accused "criminals," or a new way of doing business.

It is usually the case that the players tire of this setting-level quickly. They yearn to be more important in their surroundings. The street is a good place to start a campaign. A band on their way up is usually founded on the street level. As the characters gain experience and achieve little victories, they want to do more. They want to effect larger changes in their world.

City

The city is a strange place in 2020. America has become so balkanized by the clashing forces of economics, pollution, and the media, it is a city-state economy. The large metroplex areas are a controlling force in how the country works. Inside these cities are the micro-systems of the street held together by the city government, and the economic power-structure (legal and illegal). The city is a much more complicated place.

Most *Cyberpunk 2020* games take place on the city-level. Most of the time the players can mess with the Police, or the City Services, without fear of direct retribution. They have the power to cause a lot of trouble, and the resources to stay out of the way when it hits the fan. More powerful characters (especially heroes, explained below) have a nasty habit of carrying around their reputations; which can make it difficult to stay low profile. *Never Fade Away* is a perfect example of higher-powered characters operating in a city-power setting. Even though the immediate goals and objectives in the campaign were of a lower-powered nature, the repercussions were nationwide (in some circles even larger). This is what happens when a character's gestalt outstrips the mission's objectives.

Nation

Nations are large places and considerably more influential than cities. In National-level games the players usually begin to really have an opportunity for significant change. These are the games in which Revolutions are started, Corporations are toppled, and legends are born. On the darker side, there is no escape. If the players want to run around like they are important, then they had better be ready to deal with all the crap that comes with it. People will want to kill them just for the fifteen minutes of fame it will bring.

One of the most cyberpunk of possibilities is that the Team is not really equipped or ready to play with "the big dogs". These young punks are thrust into the water and then must swim, or die. *Land Of The Free* is a good example of this. In many cases the Team will not even realize that they are in the national arena. To them it may at first just seem to be a dangerous run, even an exceptionally dangerous run. They may not realize the powers they are dealing with until the Climax, or somewhere in the Synthesis. This can be a useful plot element, so play it up.

World

Everything the characters do will be important on at least a National level. At this level the game resembles a classic strategy game, like chess or Diplomacy™, much more than any cyberpunk game they are familiar with. The only literary example that comes to mind is *Tower To The Sky*, by Jennings. Even it is lacking in some respects. When your average player has the power of a Nation behind them, things get blurry. The best example is *CyberGeneration*.

Character Power Defining The Campaign

These are guidelines for setting up character images. Ref's should use them to show the players what they are looking for in a general sense. Do not feel constrained by these things. If you want your operators to have a little less cash, that's okay. If you want your Heroes to be a little younger, so what. What you don't want is one character that outclasses the rest of the players totally. A good rule of thumb is not to have characters more than one level apart.

Mover

These are beginning players in the game, and the standard characters covered in the *2020* rulebook.
Examples Include:
Your first character.
Age: 15-20
Stat points: 50
Skill Points: 40 +pickup
Special Ability Level: 1-4
Starting Cash: 1,000-10,000eb
Reputation: 1-3

OPERATOR

Operators are the average Edgerunners, and above-average movers in 2020. These are experienced people, who may even be in the top few percent of their professions. Experienced Refs can see that the original character generation system is great for novice campaigns, but they run into system blocks for more powerful characters.

These characters have budding organizations sprouting up around them. Things start to get easier to deal with on a day-to-day level. The down side is that they are starting to get "known" in all the wrong circles as well. Adversaries pop up more often, and occasionally old enemies realize you are still alive.

Examples Include:
Nomad Santiago, Ripperjack, Sgt. Max Hammerman (NCPD).
Age: 20-28
Stat Points: 60-65
Skill Points: 50 +1.5 x pickup
Special Ability Level: 5-6
Starting Cash: 25,000 euro+ (*)
Reputation: 4-7

* strong concept only

HEROIC

These people are local icons and media figures. They have organizations of their own, or they represent ranking arms of larger networks. Even though they haven't had to worry about a meal in months, a letter bomb does show up on occasion. Security is getting expensive, and your tailor is gouging you constantly. By the way, some talk-show wants to know if you are free on Tuesday.

Most Referees start to have major control problems at this level. The maintenance of a character takes so much time that adventure can lag, or go on wanting for a few hours. It is usually best to only have one or two players at this level the first time. Because they take so much time anyway, Fixers and Netrunners are easiest.

Examples Include:
Kerry Eurodyne, Erin Malour, Morgan Blackhand (before 2023), and Bes Isis.
Age : any (*)
Stat Points: 65-70 *
Skill Points: 60 +3 x pickup
Special Ability Level: 7+
Starting Cash: 100,000 euro+ (*)
Reputation: 8-9 (*)

* strong concept only

SUPERHEROIC

The introduction of *CyberGen* and *MaxMetal* really bring to the forefront the possibility (really the probability) of Superheroic 'Punk games. But those are Superheroic because of 'powers.' Some people are Superheroic level just because they have been around so long.

These are the gods of the new age: Generals, Presidents, Kings, International Media Icons. They live in the lap of luxury 24hrs. a day, 7 days a week. Most haven't been below the 50th floor of a building in weeks, and then only to go out slumming. Even slumming they have a full strike team on-call, and two very deceiving Gemini full-conversions as bodyguard and chauffeur. The most famous designers in the world come begging for you to wear their new line (designed with you in mind), and will pay handsomely for an endorsement. You don't talk to the press any more, you have your own. There have been three mentions of your name in Top-10 songs this year. Everyone in the world is waiting for you to screw-up.

Examples Include:
Alt Cunningham, Mr. John Silverhand, Jack Maxximum, and Saburo Arasaka.
Age: any *
Stat Points: 75+ *
Skill Points: 70 +4 x pickup
Special Ability Level: 9+
Starting Cash: 1000000eb. *
Reputation: 10 *

* strong concept only
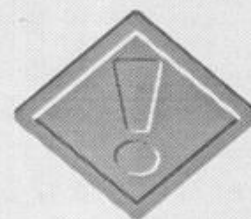
SPYKE NOTE:
I would not feel comfortable recommending that anyone actually allow Superheroic players in your games; unless you are an absolute master. It's usually best for these kinds of people to be around as NPC's. If you are going to do this to yourself, just have one. Don't tempt fate. When you are this powerful your closest associates had better be your friends.
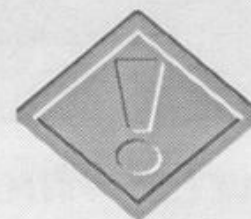
SPYKE NOTE:
I once ran a game where the team was hired as Roadies and Security for the 2013 Watchmen tour. The "real" crew was struck by a weird flu virus (intentional, but the band had flown in a separate plane). One entire adventure revolved around reclaiming the band's luggage (all 24 trunks)... It was a scream.

DOWN & DIRTY WITH MIKE PONDSMITH

UNCLE MIKE'S FAVORITE TRICKS FOR BAD PUNKS

It's another Saturday night and you and your group are Punking. You've got the CD cranked to the latest industrial slam, mirrorshades all around, and the action promises to get hot and heavy. Then it happens. Your players get Out of Control.

It's easy to get Out of Control in a *Cyberpunk* game; after all, when the shooting starts and the rippers flash,

players get excited and stop thinking. But that's not the real Out of Control I'm talking about. The version I speak of is when they take your Game out of control; when they start calling all the shots, screwing with the plotline, arguing the rules and generally making life difficult for all the other participants. It's an ugly thing when your players get out of control. Plot lines begin to fall apart, or take strange twists that go nowhere. Players start to fight for the limelight, and roleplaying becomes an every-punk-for-himself free-for-all in which group unity hits the skids.

But I'm going to tell you a few secrets to stop it.

WHY PLAYERS GET OUT OF HAND

Most of the time, the best players go rogue for one reason: they're bored and lazy. The Game itself isn't challenging enough, so they start to pick apart the background. Rules become all important; so does acquiring massive amounts of cyberwear and money instead of getting out on the Street and adventuring. If they had something to keep them heap scared and on the run, they wouldn't have time to get bored. It would be too dangerous to get lazy. And that's your job; to keep your players moving and on the run before they

have a chance to slack off and concentrate on niggling details like the velocity of a 20mm shell.

WHY PLAYERS GET LAZY

Why do players get lazy? Because you do. Instead of giving them a challenge that will really rattle them down to their socks, you give them formula missions and routine extractions. You've started to rely on the basic plot devices: bad guys who are as smart as the average rock, situations where the sides are drawn black-and-white; goals where the object is written in flaming twenty foot letters. In short, your players have learned to assume too much; to get lazy and expect things; to concentrate on power plays and rules squabbling rather than just trying to stay alive.

Your players have also become lazy because you've waited for us over here at Talsorian to tell you that it's okay to hammer their little butts into the astroturf, instead of acting with the God-Given authority of the True *Cyberpunk* Referee. They've come to expect that they'll get their way because you're not going to play rough with them. You're going to let them do just what they want, or they'll yell at you, call you names and accuse you of being mean to them. Well, here's the truth. The world of *Cyberpunk* is a bad, bad place. You're supposed to be mean to them. That's your job. You don't even have to cheat. All you have to do is play the world as tough as it really should be. And you're not.

Your players have gotten lazy because they think they have it wired. They think they have enough money, firepower and cybertech to stop anything. They no longer fear the environment or respect it. And they don't respect you because you haven't called them on it.

Well, not any more, goboy. It's time for Uncle Mike to tell you how to take off the kid gloves and slip your puny meat mitts into a pair of shiny new iridium cyberclaws. I'm going to tell you a few of the useful and nasty tricks I've mastered after playing this puppy longer than anyone else alive.

Pull out your notebooks, kids. It's clobberin' time.

MAKE THE ENEMY SMART, REAL SMART

The first step to a long lasting and productive campaign. Most Referees don't really think about their bad guys. Instead, they think of them as mere obstacles, which they then scale to be just barely beatable by the players. But it's hard to avoid when you have to crank out faceless hordes every session.

Here's whatcha do. Sit down a moment and put yourself in the position of your bad guys. What do they fear? What are they worried about? What do they value? For starters, they fear getting killed. And they worry about it. This means that they will do just as much as any player character to prevent this from happening. If players wear armor, the bad guys will wear armor. If the players set traps, the bad guys will set traps. If the players get cybered up, the bad guys will also get cybered up. In short, start thinking of your NPCs like player characters. Make them real, three-dimensional people. Don't produce quantity. Concentrate on producing quality; the way you would if you were a player. A few smart baddies will go a lot farther than a million dumb ones.

If your NPCs are smart, they'll make the players work to kill them. They'll boobytrap doors instead of just locking them. They'll hide in ambush with long range weapons. They'll crash AV's through the sides of the heroes' hideout. They'll send decoys bioscupted like they are into the sharp end. They'll find out who the players value most and use them as hostages. In short, they will never, ever again just walk into a room without armor, carrying a big gun, and expect to survive. Nope, they'll send in two hundred smart, scared goons first.

TURN THE PLAYERS BACK ON THEMSELVES

I call this one the Mirror. Your players now have the biggest guns and the most cybertech ever assembled on one human body. How do you deal with them? Send them after themselves.

At the end of the next game, grab all your players' character sheets and photocopy them. Add 2 points to each of their

skills. Now, strip off all the personality and lifepath stuff and create your own, putting them in place of the character's entries. Juggle the genders and shuffle the names; then send these duplicates out to whomp your players. Instant carnage.

Why does this work? Very simple. Nobody, but nobody is going to hold back when creating and maintaining their favorite character. A player worth his or her salt will always find the best ways to bend and twist the rules to get the maximum effectiveness. Now that they've done the work, you just use their advantages against them. When they get better characters, copy the sheets again.

If your players have discovered a secret cybertech source, have the badguys discover a similar one. If your players have found a way to beat cyberpsychosis, have the NPCs find another (unspecified) way to do the same. Even if they discover a way to defeat their enemies, they've just provided you with a way of defeating them ("Ah! So this EMP pulse stops the bad guy's cyberwear, eh? Guess they'll have to steal one of your weapons and use it on you!").

CREATE A FEW UNBEATABLE FOES

There should be always threats your players can't beat; foes who constantly out-think them and kick their cybered butts into the dumpster. For every small Corporation they defeat, there should be a Really Bad Corporation that will easily whomp them on the regional level without ever even calling in the national office.

Take Saburo Arasaka. Referees constantly complain to me that their players walk all over the Dragon of the East and his Boys in Black. But that shouldn't happen if they play Saburo smart, instead of as a cookie-cutter bad guy. Think of Saburo's resources. This is a man who can easily call up a fleet of heavily-armed AV attack vehicles anywhere in the world. This is a man who has armies of highly trained troops, access to the entire Net, spies on every corner, links into all the telecom lines, and the ability to hire an almost infinite number of Netrunners, AI's and Solos to hunt down anyone that irritates him. In fact, by the time a problem

reaches Saburo's level of Arasaka, it should have gone through at least six levels of divisional flunkies, each more dangerous than the last.

Your question is not why Saburo can't stop your players. No, your question is really, what's stopping Saburo from bothering to annihilate these petty nuisances? If this guy can hold his own against Donald Lundee of Militech, what makes your players think they're a threat? It's time to disabuse them of this vainglorious notion that the world revolves around them.

For starters, there is no reason in Hades that your players will ever, until they are major corporations in themselves, ever be able to penetrate Saburo's personal life at all. Start small; give them a regional Arasaka rep to deal with. Make this guy someone who wants to keep his job anyway he can. Let him use the almost unlimited funds of Arasaka to arrange traces on anyone who runs the local Arasaka (or Arasaka client) datafort. Don't even make a fuss about it. Let our Regional bad guy sort through those million traces till he gets a few interesting ones, then send out hit squads randomly. Let your players fight this guy for awhile. And when he's defeated, then bring in the District Manager to deal with them. At any point that they decide to fly to Tokyo and face down the old man himself, waste 'em. Let's be realistic. If they can barely beat the Divisional Office, why should they have a chance against the World Headquarters?

Who is Morgan Blackhand & Why is He Still Alive?

Morgan Blackhand (my archtypical Solo character), is not alive because he's the best around. He's the best because he's alive. Simple. Even though I wrote the rules, I don't have to bend them to play Morgan. I just play him smarter; I always play him as though he were a personal character I've nurtured for years and that I really don't want to lose.

What does this mean to you as a *Cyberpunk* Referee? Also simple. When creating an NPC, you need to really play that NPC as a fully-realized character,

not as an extra hired gun who will do the player's bidding. Your NPCs must have their own agendas and their own sense of self-preservation. Morgan, for all of his now formidable abilities, would never think of taking the sharp end for a bunch of wet-eared squeeb Players. He wouldn't have lived this long if he just acted as a hired gun. He's far more likely to let the players walk into the sharp end first, see how many fall, and then make his judgements accordingly. He might save them if there was some reasonable chance it fit into his agenda. He might walk out on them just as easily.

Make sure your NPCs have their own reason for doing things. Give them thier own Lifepaths, habits and problems, and visit them upon your players. Allow them to betray, outthink or outflank the players whenever it seems reasonable to do so.

Let Them Have All the Power in the World Until They Choke On It

My personal favorite. Players think they want to be able to do anything. But rarely do they think out the consequences of getting their wish. I'll give you an example. Many years ago in one of my science fiction games, I gave a character an extremely powerful piece of cybernetic hardware. (Liberally lifted from Harlan Ellison's *Demon With A Glass Hand*, a wonderful SF story and *Outer Limits* episode. I steal from only the best.) The cybertech was deceptively simple; a metal palm with one thumb and one forefinger. Built into this prothesis was a talking super-AI computer which informed its new owner that it required its remaining three fingers in order to activate its full capacities. Our hero set out to recover the fingers, fighting bad guys of increasing power and capabilities. Each time, the Hand helpfully enhanced his abilities through neural boosts, chemical feeds and secret information. Each new finger gave the hand and its owner even more power, until eventually they were unstoppable; regularly defeating the toughest baddies in the universe.

Our hero had by this time thoroughly honked off all of the major bad guys and many of the most powerful good guys as well. He'd become so powerful that he'd insulted everyone he dealt with; who needed them when you have the Power Cosmic on your wrist? He had no allies and lots of enemies who were banding together to get him just because they couldn't do it alone.

Then I dropped the bomb. In the middle of the last titanic battle, the Hand suddenly said; "Hey! Look! The weapon that enemy over there has contains my last missing digit!" Our hero obligingly blasted the enemy, grabbed the finger, and screwed it on. The Hand said, "Thanks! Now I can go rescue my fellow AI's who were imprisoned centuries before!" And in the middle of the battle, with the player surrounded by the worst supervillain teamup of all time, it blithely teleported away. Eep...

Had our player thought out the fact that he was becoming increasingly dependent on his cybernetic superweapon; that he was making lots of enemies and alienating his allies, he might have been a bit more cautious about greedily grabbing the gusto. But players rarely think about caution in the search for power. And that's how you can control them.

This, by the way conforms to one of Pondsmith's Laws of Gaming: *If it's smarter than you are, it probably has its own Agenda.* The collarary to this is: *If it's really nifty, it probably belongs to someone else.* Whenever players accumulate power, they will gain enemies to match. They will gain people who exist just to take that power away. They will gain notoriety far beyond your capacity to control. These axioms should be a given. The next time your Rockerboy player decides that he has a 10 Charismatic Leadership and is the equal of Johnny Silverhand, go for it. Hound him with the tabloid press (hard to do a black op with *A Current Affair* following you, neh?). Regularly have him extracted by rival recording companies. Have rival bands attempt to kill him*. If your players have gathered a lot of power; if they're the equal of Galacticus the Space God, for Bog's Sakes, it only means that

* Yes, I have done all this. It's fun.

there's a guy out there who was Galacticus' older brother and boy, is he pissed.

Give Them What They Want, Then Take It Away

Players have this weird hangup about accumulating stuff. Vehicles, money, weapons, cyberware; all things that can make your life miserable if you don't have a way to control it. But there's a built in method of control: taking it away. After all, if your players steal things, who says they're the only ones in 2020 with a taste for grand larceny?

If your players are accumulating too many weapons, the NCPD and the local boosters should have noticed by now and taken their arsenal away. If they have a lot of money stashed in their accounts, there's some netrunner out there who probably has learned to siphon it out invisibly. If they have AV vehicles, grav tanks or choppers, there's at least a dozen fixers who could sell those vehicles on the market and a million guys slightly richer than the players who wouldn't mind buying them (or one talented techie who specializes in hotwiring military vehicles for joyriding). If you've got a really cybered-up monster-Solo, then C-SWAT has enough firepower to waste or capture his metal butt and strip all that nasty 'ware off him before he becomes a public menace.

The world of *Cyberpunk* is an unstable, dangerous, theft-prone place. There's no reason you can't make your players have to send every waking moment and every spare dime protecting what they've gathered against the hordes of desperate, equally-talented people on the Street. After all, this materialism thing is just getting in the way of their Enlightenment, right?

Make Them Responsible For Their Actions

How many times have your players faced an NPC and said, "Yeah, I blow him/her/it away?" Ever thought this one out? First of all, no man is an island. The booster you thwack today has a big brother, sister or boss you'll face tomorrow. A
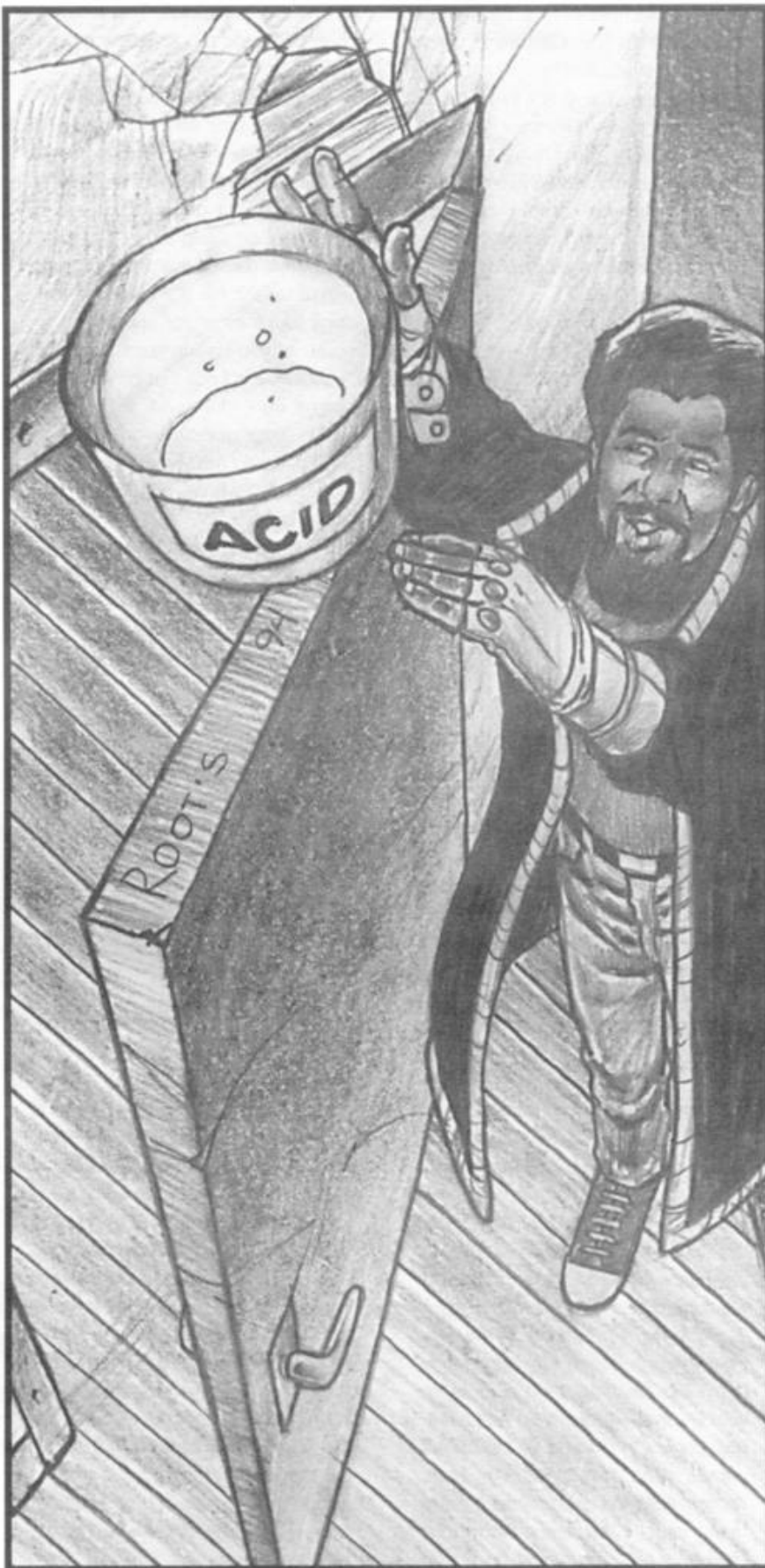
wonderful example of this, by the way, is the western *The Cheyenne Social Club*. At the start, Jimmy Stewart blows Villain #1 away. The guy's five brothers come gunning for Jimmy. He finally blows them away. Next thing he knows, the guy's entire family, some fifty strong, are gunning for him. He leaves town, never to return. There's no reason why that won't work in 2020 just as well as it does in 1871.

This is only one way of making players responsible for their actions. There are plenty of others. Insult a local politico and you're likely to get your home rezoned for a toxic waste dump. Cut someone off in traffic and they're likely to follow you home and frag your cat. Steal an AV and the NCPD will tow it for improper parking and registration. Every action has a reaction. Make sure your players always get the feedback they deserve.

How to Kill the Toughest Solo

1) Use bombs. They're nice. They're efficient. They don't care how much armor you have. I have hidden bombs behind doors, inside TV sets, under piles of trash players will just stride through without thinking (how often do you notice garbage in Night City?), inside light switches (with the bomb on a timer under the bed), and in the toilet. I once got a hardcase by planting the bomb under the floor under his bed. The trigger was a paper thin contact switch between the mattress and the springs, set to go off if sat upon or exposed to light. He looked under the bed, natch. Then he looked under the mattress. Blew his legs off, as I recall. (Editor's Note—see the new *CP2020* Explosives rules in the Rules Appendix for the latest on the subject.)

2) Gang up strategically. Every con, I get a tough bunch that thinks they can whip anything. I go after them with fifty Inquisitors armed with paintball guns. One group of Inquisitors carries sleep drug loads. The other carries acid loads. The sleep drug guys usually hit the unarmored members of the party first; they drop out in the first round. The armored members stride in all cocky in their protection to save their buddies. They ignore the rounds hitting all over them, until they start to smell burning plastic. Then they skin out of the acid-covered armor double time, just as the first group of Inquisitors pull out their sleep loads...I've killed about five parties that way (it's even worse for the full borgs, 'cause they can't take their armor off). Of course, some of you having read this think; "Hey, he won't pull that on me." And you're right. Just wait till you see what I'm going to have the Inquisitors do next time.

The whole point is, I nail these guys by planning to counter each strategy they'll use and arranging to hit them from several directions. EMP guns alone won't stop a whole party. But EMP guns and gas and bombs and snipers and cross-fires will eventually get everyone.

3) Be Sneaky. There's no rule that says the world's toughest solo has to get into a face to face gunfight. My favorite way to nail someone is to put a sniper on a rooftop about a mile away with a high powered rifle. I just wait. Eventually, I've built up enough aim modifiers and I shoot. At a mile away, there's no chance they'll see it coming until it's too late. Of course, those players reading this will go out and buy dummies to put in their windows. No problem. Use an AV-4 and take out the whole building.

To sum up, you don't have to give them warnings every moment. You can plant all kinds of clues, or you can force them to become paranoid. But you don't have to have an open gunfight just to settle the score.

4) Be indirect. Everybody sleeps sometimes. They also have to go to the can, and eat. Use poison on the toilet seat. Open the gas mains while they sleep. Spray non-feline reactive toxins on the cat's fur. Undermine the floor of their conapt. Or just wire the elevator buttons.

In short, look at the everyday things your players have to do: pay bills, eat, sleep, walk the dog, watch the vid—and exploit their inherent lethality. I once wired a TV set to broadcast an EMP pulse when the TV remote (and only the remote) was activated. Amazing how easy it is to waltz into a room and carry off the dazed occupants when all they can do is twitch.

5) Appeal to their baser instincts. Everyone will take a super-powerful weapon if they think they can steal it. Booby trap it. I once nailed a very smart character by putting a really attractive female in front of him. She seemed to like the character, and more importantly, she was the girlfriend of this guy's main rival. He couldn't resist, and after making a careful check to see if she had any weapons (no), cyberware (no), or bodyguards (no), he went for it. Unfortunately, she had been bio-engineered with pherenome-producing glands that made anyone she slept with addicted to her. The victim had to sleep with her at least twice a day or he started to have severe withdrawal reactions. As soon as the withdrawal hit, our hero's new input went back to her old boyfriend, who immediately flew her off to Rio and surrounded her with a hundred guards. Seems he did this to every rival who showed up on his turf...

So let your Solo players be their own worst enemies. Give them toys and situations they can't resist, and their guards will be down when you hit 'em.

Don't Play Videogames

Huh? Let me explain. Videogames are predictable. They don't change. You start on one level, beat the henchmen monsters, defeat a few traps and take down the Boss Monster for that level. Then it's on to the next level. Predictable.

Don't be predictable. Make Arasaka a good guy for a change. Have a major villain change sides. Have a good guy do something evil for the wrong reasons. If they've just fought boostergangers, have a group of fuzzy, plague-ridden puppies behind the next door. Constantly change the parameters. Make sure that the Boss

Monster skips a level every so often so they'll go crazy looking for it. ("We thought when we beat the Militech guards and got into the complex, we'd find the Head of Security there waiting for us!")

THERE ARE THINGS WORSE THAN DEATH

Next time, don't kill them. It's too easy. Put them in the hospital—for weeks. Capture them. Brainwash them. Force them to do your evil bidding or the hostages die. Instead of poisoning the players, give them a slow, wasting disease and make them travel the world hunting the antidote. Make them work for the bad guys in order to stop a greater threat.

Anyone can kill a Player character. But it's boring. Think of ways to creatively use those characters when you have them in your power.

IF ALL ELSE FAILS, CHANGE THE REALITY

Just because the background is in the Book, it doesn't mean it's the only way. Your players are just as capable of buying a copy of *Cyberpunk* as you are (in fact, we encourage it) and using it against you. So feel free to change stuff. I give you permission. I mean, after all, what you're playing is basically an extended version of my *Cyberpunk* campaign, and Bog knows I've changed that enough.

In fact, changing can work for you. The more your players know, the more cocky they'll be. Let them correct you when they spot something different than the given world background. Just smile and say, "Not in this game." They will automatically assume you're wrong, until the real facts come up and clobber them. "Hey!" they'll scream, "it says in Corpbook Sixteen that Arasaka has no space shuttles." And you'll say, "I told you last week that there was an order to Hermes aerospace from Tokyo..."

There you have it; a round sample of the sort of devious and deadly possibilities you can now use to enhance your 2020 games. Now don't let me catch you whining again about your players getting out of control. You have the tools. You have the power. Now use it; fairly, wisely, and nastily.

After all, you're the one who wanted to be *Cyberpunk*.

NEW RULES

These are a mix of various rules, tables, and entries that didn't fit in other supplements, or that were referred to in the Essays section. But first:

Diet-Mite™: 1,000 eb., 1D6/2 HC. You'll never be fat again! Eat as much as you want, of whatever you want. The nanites in your stomach screen your intake, passing on whatever you need and passing through what you don't. Diets, fad exercises, and emergency bio-sculpts are a thing of the past! (see Chapter 2, page 20).

HIGH NOON SHOOTOUT

This alternative combat system uses many of the concepts from the basic *Friday Night Fire Fight*. Any derivations from *FNFF* are noted below.

Initiative is determined the same way as in *FNFF*. Ambushes work the same way, too.

Actions: A person can take one action in a 3-second turn. A second action may be taken, giving a -3 modifier to both actions. Actions are the same as those defined in *FNFF*.

Movement is taken from *Saturday Night Scuffle*: A person may move up to his MA stat in meters and do one other action (the -3 penalty for doing two actions does not apply here; the movement is not considered to be another

action), or a person may do nothing but run and move 3x his MA stat in meters.

Melee and Hand-to-Hand Combat is decided as per *FNFF* rules: both attacker and defender roll 1D10 and add the appropriate skill; defender wins ties. If the attacker scores, go to the Damage section.

Ranged Combat is a bit different. Each kind of weapon has a difficulty to hit, depending on range and adding situa-

RANGED FIRE MODIFIERS

Target Immobile	+2	Large target	+2
Target Dodging	-2	Small target	-2
Target Dodging, REF 10+	-4	Tiny target	-4
Fast draw/snapshot	-2	Laser scope (50m> only)	+1
Ambush	+2	Smartgun	+1
Aiming at body location	-3	W/Smartgoggles or target	
Blinded/in the dark	-2	scope	+2
Firing while running	-2	3-round burst	+1
Firing while dodging	-4	5-round burst	+2
Aiming(per round)	+1	10-round burst	+3
Prone Target	-2	25-round burst	+5

These modifiers are added to the roll to hit the target.

SHOOTING DIFFICULTY TABLE

RANGE TO TARGET IN METERS

WEAPON	0-12	13-25	26-50	51-100	101-150	151-400	401-800	800+
Handgun*	10	15	20	25	30	NA	NA	NA
SMG, Bow	5	10	15	20	25	30	NA	NA
Shotgun	10	15	25	30	NA	NA	NA	NA
Rifle, MG	10	10	10	15	20	25	30	30
Laser~	5	5	10	10	20	25	NA	NA
Cannon!	15	15	10	10	15	20	20	25
Missile@	NA	10	10	10	10	15	15	20
"Rockets"	15	15	15	20	20	25	30	35

* Includes paintball guns, dart guns, tasers.

~ Includes microwavers.

! Includes tank cannons, rail guns, autocannons, recoilless rifles, auto-grenade launchers, grenade launchers, and other direct-fire large guns.

@ Includes ATGMs, SAMs & mini-missiles.

"Rockets" means LAWs, free-fire rockets, RPG A and Bs, mini-rockets, & wrist rakate.

WOUND DAMAGE TABLE

1D10 ROLL

DICE VALUE	1	2-3	4-5	6-7	8-9	10-11	12-14	15+
(1D6/3)	0	0	1	1	1	2	3	4
(1D6/2)	1	1	1	2	2	3	4	5
(1D6)	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(2D6)	2	3	4	5	6	7*	8*	9*
(3D6)	3	4*	5*	6*	7*	8**	9**	10**
(4D6)	4*	5*	6*	7*	8**	9**	NA	NA
(5D6)	5*	6*	7*	8**	9**	10**	NA	NA
(6D6)	6*	7**	8**	9**	10**	11**	NA	NA
(3D10)	4*	5**	6**	7**	8**	9**	NA	NA
(4D10)	6**	7**	8**	9**	10**	11**	NA	NA
(5D10)	7**	8**	9**	10**	11**	12**	NA	NA
(6D10)	8**	9**	10**	11**	12**	13**	NA	NA
(7D10)	9**	10**	11**	12**	13**	14**	NA	NA
(8D10)	11**	12**	14**	16**	18**	20**	NA	NA
(9D10)	14**	16**	18**	20**	24**	28**	NA	NA
(More)	16**	18**	20**	24**	28**	32**	NA	NA

(More) = More damage than 9D10.

*Causes 1 point of blunt trauma through soft armor even if failing to penetrate.

**Causes 1 point of blunt trauma through hard armor even if failing to penetrate.

tional modifiers. By and large, these modifiers are the same as the *FNFF* ones, but have been streamlined to fit the easier difficulties. As usual, roll 1D10 and add to the firer's total; if the total is equal or more than the difficulty, the firer hits the target.

Important note: Remember, you can't fire a weapon farther than twice your listed range. An RPG-A may be able to fire over 800m, but a LAW cannot.

When firing **automatic fire**, every point that the roll to hit exceeds the difficulty indicates another round striking the target, up to a maximum of the number of rounds fired. *FNFF* rules for Suppressive Fire may be used if desired.

Suppressive Fire and Area Effect rules (including the rules for shotguns) are unchanged from *FNFF*.

Damage is worked out on the table above. For each hit, either from melee or ranged combat, roll 2 differently-colored D10, designating one as Location and the other as Damage. Read off the damage from the chart above, subtract the location's armor (taking armor-piercing into effect), then double any points remaining after armor is subtracted. Double this again if the target is taking damage to the

head! Subtract the target's BTM from this total; if the total is 1 or more, apply to the target's wound track. If the total is less than one, apply Blunt Trauma.

Any wound damage taken can mandate Shock/Stun tests and the appropriate effects, if such tests are called for by the target's wound status.

Cyberlimbs have SDP, not wounds. Each cyberlimb can sustain 1/2 x its SDP in wound points (of the sort that would usually be applied to the Wound

ARMOR TABLE

Armor subtracts its protection from the Wound Damage above (halved if the weapon is appropriately armor-piercing).

SP Rating	Armor Protection
4-13	1
14-17	3
18-19	5
20-24	6
25-30	7
31-35	8
36-39	9
40-49	10
50-59	12
60-69	14
70-79	16
80	18

track) before they stop working.

ACPA suits: Don't double the damage that gets through the armor. Ignore the Toughness Modifier. Each limb, and the torso, can take damage points equal to their SDP before shutting down. The same applies to full 'borg conversions. Please note that damage does not go to exterior or interior equipment, but directly to the limb or torso in question. This is to avoid the problem with the equipment SDP that makes ACPA suits practical tanks when using the straight *Friday Night Fire Fight*. If a firer wishes to target specific pieces of equipment, then use 1/10 of the listed SDP points to absorb damage points, as above.

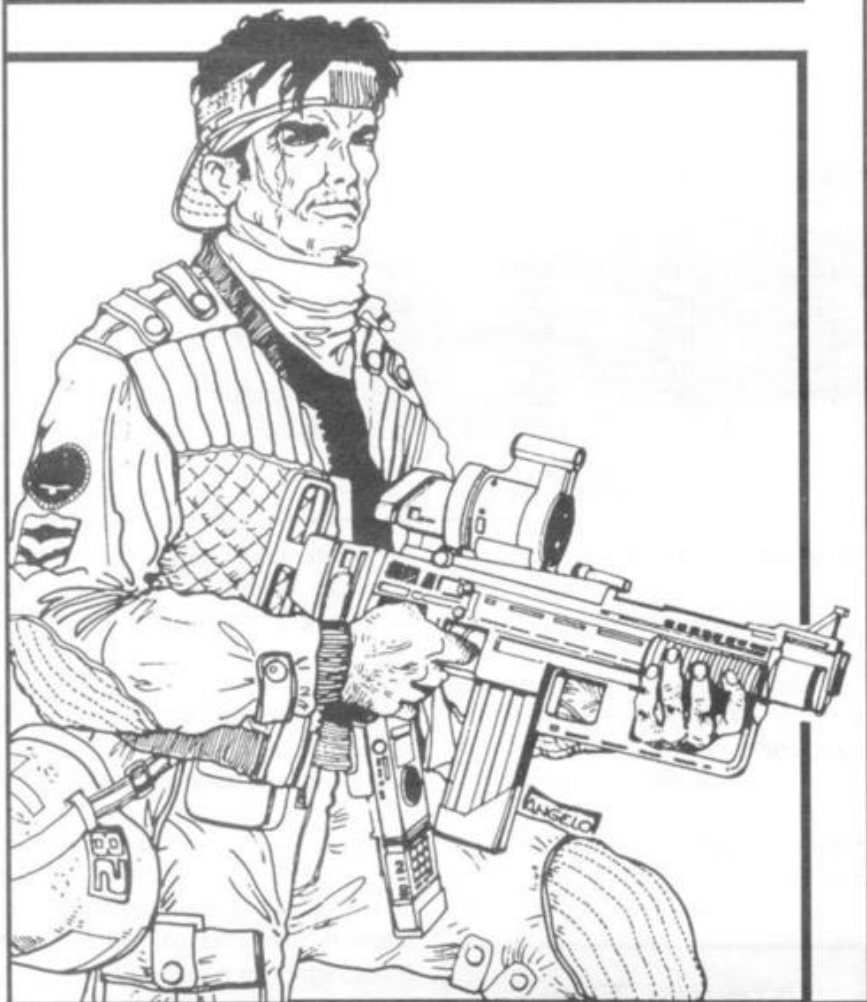**Vehicles:** Use the vehicle system from *Maximum Metal*.

Blunt Trauma is caused by impacts. Kevlar may stop bullets from penetrating, but the impacts don't feel good. Any time the target's BTM reduces damage that penetrates armor to 0 or fewer points, the target sustains one damage point on the wound track of blunt trauma. This damage is temporary—blunt trauma damage heals at a rate of 1 point per two hours (1 per hour with nanosurgeons)—so mark it specially. Blunt trauma damage can add up, temporarily

crippling the victim, or even killing him if the Wound track falls to Mortal! (There have been shotgun fatalities where the victim was wearing good body armor that prevented the shot from penetrating, but the bruising caused fatal surface hemorrhaging.)

Some weapon impacts are so powerful that they can cause blunt trauma through armor. Damage results that can cause blunt trauma to soft and hard armors are listed on the Wound Damage Table. If the target's armor is not penetrated by an attack that causes blunt trauma to that armor type, then the target still takes 1 point of temporary blunt trauma damage.

Crippling Injuries occur when a victim's limb sustains a lot of damage. If a victim takes 6-12 points of damage to a limb (after doubling the damage result and subtracting BTM), then the limb is crippled and can't be used. If the victim's limb receives 13+ points of damage on the Wound track, the limb is useless, blown off, shredded or otherwise in need of replacement. **Modifiers:** AP weapons halve armor protection and damage. Edged weapons halve soft armor protection, but do not halve damage. Shotgun slugs, the Barrett-Arasaka 20mm, and HEAT rounds halve all armor protection, but do not halve damage. Round up all uneven damage and armor protection

scores after halving. **Martial Arts** add +1 damage point per 3 points of **Martial Arts** skill (round down). Body Type adds bonus to the damage die roll: V Weak = -2, Weak = -1, Average = +0, Strong = +1, V Strong = +2, Body 11-12 = +4, Body 13-14 = +5, Body 15+ = +8.

Example: Ripsmash, a booster with a Body of 14 and a set of wolvers, takes on another booster. He slashes his target's arm, which is protected by a light armor jacket (SP 14, soft). The wolvers (definitely edged weapons) halve that soft armor protection. Ripsmash rolls a 2, adding +5 for his Body strength. This yields a damage result of 6; subtracting the armor protection of 2, 8 points get through to the hapless victim's arm (6 after the victim's BTM is subtracted). That arm is crippled, and the victim is at the Serious Wound stage, requiring a Stun/Shock roll.

The victim's buddy gets even by firing a 12mm SMG at Ripsmash. The range is 15m and the gunner is firing a 10-round burst with a Smartgun and target scope. He rolls a grand total of 19, hitting Ripsmash with 9 rounds. The first round hits Ripsmash's left leg with a roll of 4. The rounds are AP, so Ripsmash's SP 20 hard armor is halved. The damage of 3 (damage is halved because of the AP rounds) minus armor protection 3 equals 0 points of damage. Ripsmash still takes 1 point of blunt trauma damage.

The other rounds in the salvo do much the same thing, inflicting another 6 blunt trauma points on him and driving him to the Serious stage. A pair of rounds bounce off, failing to do enough damage to hurt him (rolls of 1 and 2).

Frustrated, yet another heavily-armed punk takes a shot at Ripsmash, this time with a shotgun loaded with slugs. One of the slugs bruises Ripsmash's chest, but the other hits his arm with a damage roll of 6. 7 points - 3 for armor = 4. Doubled to 8, subtracting 5 for Ripsmash's BTM, the behemoth finally sustains a wound—3 points to his arm. This drives him to the Critical wound stage, leaving his REF, INT and CL halved as Ripsmash staggers around like a poleaxed prizefighter, stunned by the immense battering he's taken. He's not dead, but he doesn't feel very good. If he wasn't wearing doorgunner gear, he'd be hamburger.

DETAILED EXPLOSIVES IN CYBER-PUNK 2020

"...Ripperjack is caught in his own explosion...Bad move, 'Jack." Explosives are capable of causing tremendous damage. They are relatively available on the street, and are easier to smuggle than, say, an RPG-A. But there's a reason for the **Demolitions** skill. Using detonables is a trickier proposition than pointing a weapon and pulling the trigger...

DEMOLITIONS SKILL

Any character trying to use any explosive as a demolition had better have **Demolitions** skill. An unskilled attempt that results in failure becomes a Fumble; a further roll of 8-10 means the explosive goes off prematurely, as in "in your face" (a further Fumble roll of 8-10 means the same thing for a character with **Demolitions** skill). A roll of 1 (a natural Fumble) means it goes off automatically.

What constitutes using an explosive as a demolition? Any use of an explosive munition, like a grenade or claymore, for blowing a hole in something, like blowing a hole through a wall or door, or trying to cut out a structural support, etc.—and even then only someone with **Demolitions** skill can use a grenade or other non-demolition detonable for a demolitions use. Also, any use of a proper explosive detonable—TNT, plastique, C6, etc. Suggested difficulties for different activities:

Using a grenade/claymore/shell to blow a hole or damage a structure: Difficulty 20+.

Using a proper explosive as a grenade/thrown bomb: Difficulty 15+. (Don't screw up.)

Tamping an explosive: Difficulty 15+. This takes at least 5 minutes.

Evaluating a structure for weak points: Difficulty 20+. A rolled score 10 points over the Difficulty means the explosive does 3 times the rolled dam-

age to the structure; a success means the explosive does 2 times the rolled damage to the structure. Failure means the explosive does normal rolled damage, and a Fumble means the explosive does 1/3 the rolled damage.

EXPLOSIVES

The normal explosives available in the *Cyberpunk* world range from the primitive to the deadly. The most simple can be put together by anyone with the right common chemicals and a knowledge of simple chemistry. The most complex are very potent, chemically complex, and hard to come by.

Nitrogen Tri-iodide can be made with kitchen cleaners. It's terribly potent, and terribly unstable, detonated by even the most trivial shocks (such as a housefly walking on it). It does 5D10 damage per kilo, with an explosive radius of 3m, and costs 2eb per kilo. It's mixed wet, and takes 2 hours per kilo to dry. It's only safe when wet; once it dries, it has a 90% chance of exploding when it encounters ANY vibration. Even talking loud. It cannot be tamped.

Nitroglycerine can be made with a **Chemistry** roll at Difficulty +15 (a lab is required, at least a makeshift one). It too is unstable, although not as horribly so as Nitrogen Tri-iodide. It does 3D10 damage per 1/4 kilo, with an explosive radius of 3m, and costs 24eb per kilo to make. It's a liquid, transported in containers. Any harsh vibration (a heavy stumble, a blow, a bullet hitting armor on that location, etc.) has a 60% chance of detonating nitroglycerine. Any fire or extreme heat touching it will detonate it for certain. Nitro is set off by throwing it against the target (risky), or by fuse (electric or fire-based). It will explode if hit by another explosion. It cannot be tamped.

Guncotton is the next step up from nitro. It's more stable, and also easily made with a **Chemistry** roll of Difficulty +15 (lab required). It does 3D10 per kilo, with an explosive radius of 3m, and costs 10eb per kilo to make. Its advantage is that it will only explode 20% of the time if violently struck (60% of the time if exposed to fire or extreme heat). It is set off with a fuse (electric or fire-based). It will explode if hit by another explosion. It can be tamped.

EXPLOSIVE MULTIPLIER TABLE

EXPLOSIVE UNITS	DAMAGE MULTIPLIER	RADIUS BANDS
1	x1	1
2	x1.5	1
3	x2	2
5	x2.5	2
8	x3	3
10	x3.5	3
12	x4	4
17	x4.5	4
21	x5	5
27	x5.5	5
33	x6	6
37	x6.5	6
41	x7	7

Damage Multiplier is the multiplier for the base damage done by one unit of explosive. So, for instance, 10 kg of C6 does 8D10 x 3.5 damage points.

Radius Bands is the number of times the explosive radius is multiplied. Each basic radius away from the explosion does half damage. The example 10 kg block of C6 would affect items up to 15 meters away from the explosion. Anything within 5m takes 4D10 x 3.5 damage points. Anything within 6-10 meters takes 2D10 x 3.5 damage points. Anything within 11-15 meters takes 1D10 x 3.5 damage points. Anything beyond that radius only takes shrapnel damage.

TNT is even more stable and reliable. It won't go off if dropped or mistreated, unless it's old or really mistreated. Making it requires a **Chemistry** roll of Difficulty +20 and a full lab. It does 4D10 per kilo, with an explosive radius of 3m, and costs 20eb per kilo to make (30+ eb to buy). It will explode 20% of the time if exposed to fire or extreme heat. It is set off with a fuse (electric or fire-based), and will explode if hit by another explosion. It can be tamped.

Plastique is very stable. It can be molded, tossed, stomped on, burned, eaten, and used for all sorts of things. Making plastique takes a **Chemistry** roll of Difficulty +25 and a full lab. It does 7D10 per kilo, with an explosive radius of 4m, and costs 50 eb per kilo to make (75+ eb to buy). It will explode 5% of the time if exposed to strong radio or electric transmission (large radios, high-tension wires, microwave guns, etc.). The source doesn't have to touch it to set it off; mere static electricity does it! It is set off with an electric fuse, and will explode if hit by another explosion. It can be tamped.

C6 is military-grade plastique. It is harder to detonate, making it safe from any detonation besides a fuse or another explosion. Making C6 takes a **Chemistry** roll of Difficulty +35 and a full lab. It does 8D10 per kilo, with an explosive radius of 5m, and costs 75 eb per kilo to make (100+ eb to buy). It only explodes 10% of the time if hit by a non-surface explosion. It is set off with an electric fuse. It can be tamped.

Detcord is plastique in a cord form. It can't be made by a chemist, only manufactured. It does 6D10 damage to the area it's touching—ovoids of it are used to blow walls. When wrapped around an object, it does triple damage—18D10—to the object! There is a 1 meter explosive radius, and it costs 100 eb per meter. It's set off by an electric fuse, and will explode if hit by another explosion. It cannot be tamped.

Fuses come in two types: electric and fire-based. Fire-based fuses actually contain a substance which makes them burn. They'll burn without oxygen (they usually contain gunpowder, or some other oxidizing substance), but won't burn when drowned. Fire-based fuses cost 5eb per meter. Electric fuses set off

a smaller explosion, a blasting cap, on the surface of the explosive. Blasting caps do 2D10 damage in a 1 meter explosive radius, and may be triggered by excessive electricity, just like plastique explosive! Caps cost 5eb apiece, the detonation wire costs 1eb per meter, and the detonator (a small battery pack with a switch) costs 10eb.

Chemical delay fuses can be constructed with about 25-75eb worth of components (Difficult **Chemistry** skill roll). These fuses cannot be set to precise per-second times, but they are unstoppable by the same methods used vs. electric fuses. Chemical "sniffers" can detect the fumes produced by a chem fuse.

EXPLOSIVE EFFECTS

Explosives do most of their damage through concussion and heat, both of which drop rapidly with distance. Furthermore, large quantities of explosive are not as efficient as smaller quantities, since the explosion wastes energy fighting itself (a 2-megaton bomb is not twice as efficient as a 1-megaton bomb). The effects on damage and radius are as follows:

CONCUSSION DAMAGE

Explosive concussion can pick people up and throw them. Any living creature in an explosion treats the damage as HEP—that is, armor SP doesn't protect, half the damage that gets through is permanent and half is stun/blunt trauma; soft armor takes 2 SP damage and hard armor takes SP damage equal to 1/4 the explosion damage! In addition, explosions can blind if you're looking at them, and will definitely deafen unless Level Dampers are employed. Equipment and other items with SDP also take 1/2 damage from concussion.

SHRAPNEL DAMAGE

Explosions kick up a lot of debris, moving at high speed. Anything and anyone within 2 extra range bands (remember, a range band is equal to the base explosive radius of the detonable) takes 1D10 damage to a random body location, unless protected behind something quite solid. Armor SP protects as usual.

Example: Ripperjack was only 5 meters away from that 5-kilo bundle of TNT he threw when it went off. Oops. He takes 1D10 x 2.5 damage on his whole body. He gets lucky and the explosion was minor; the dice roll is 6, for 15 points of damage. He takes 11 points (BTM -4), half of it stun, and has a nice chance of being knocked out. His armored long-coat (SP 18) stops the 6-point shrapnel that bounces off his arm, but suffers a loss of 2 SP.

Unfortunately, that Arasaka corp-cop was right on top of the bomb. He suffers 2D10 x 2.5 damage for 32 points, probably killing him—he's knocked out in any case—and smashing his MetalGear armor for an SP 8 loss (if he had been touching it, it would have done 4D10 x 2.5 damage, blowing him to smithereens).

By the way, it's highly unlikely that any sensitive equipment survived the explosion intact. Fragile stuff like firearms, scopes, SmartGoggles, etc.

TAMPED EXPLOSIVES

Some explosives can be tamped, shaped to fit the surface of the target, maximizing the explosive force. If an explosive is tamped, it has only half the explosive radius, but does double damage to the target.

EXPLOSIVES AND CONFINED SPACES

An explosive in a confined space, like a room, tank hull, etc., does twice its listed damage to anyone in the explosive radii (full damage at contact and range band #1, half damage at range band #2, quarter damage at range band #3, eighth damage at range band #4, etc.).

A grenade in contact with the target does double damage (shrapnel plus explosion). A grenade covered by the target does triple damage! (Shrapnel plus doubled explosion.)

Explosives are handy. A couple kilos of plastique tamped against a tank provides Penetration 12 (see *Maximum Metal*). A detcord tripwire can take the leg off a full combat 'borg! But trifle with them at your own risk. If you don't know what you're doing, you're better off leaving them alone.

SATURDAY NIGHT SLUGFEST

Cyberpunk is a vibrant game, full of flashy chrome and colorful characters, but that's not all there is to it. In fact, that's only a small part of it. The ugly truth is, most of the world (particularly America) in 2020 is dirty and desperate. Sharp, cool cyberstyle is the exception, not the rule. Only a tiny percentage (much less than 1%) of the population are Edgerunners; many people can't even afford guns. Fistfights and knife fights are much more common than gunfights for many good reasons: guns are expensive, bullets are expensive, and hand-to-hand combat is just as effective at settling disagreements but is less dangerous and less illegal than gunfire. Bar fights are considered good-natured fun rather than mortal combat, and alley-born streetscum wrestle like rats over scraps of garbage. By far the most popular form of fighting in urban surroundings is **Brawling**. Most people have never been inside a martial arts dojo and are willing to rely on their gut instincts when it comes to a tussle. Even more common is the use of on-the-spot improvised weapons such as chairs, bricks, pool sticks and broken bottles.

Still, with the increasing dangerousness of cities in 2020, everyone takes their protection more seriously. Combat is a recognized fact of life in 2020; tempers flare easily. People have plenty to be upset about; overpopulation, pollution, fear and hatred have all reached epidemic proportions.

All of these conditions have contributed to the growing crime rate, and new threats seem to come out of the alleys and sewers every day. People are scared; and while brawling in bars is fun, the urban landscape calls for preparedness. Coming from corporate thinktanks and the Streets alike, new martial arts have evolved to meet this demand.

NEW ATTACKS

Knockout Attack: By attacking nerve clusters a Martial Artist can attempt to knock out his or her opponent. Such an attack requires a minimum skill of +3 in a style that has either strike or kick. The attack modifier is -3, but if it is successful the opponent must make a stun roll at -2 or be stunned for (2 x Martial Artist's skill) rounds. A Knockout Attack does one point of real damage.

Coup De Grace: Any time a Marital Artist with a skill of +3 or better (in any style) or any person with a blunt weapon faces an opponent who is stunned (meaning he was struck last round and thus will be stunned until the at least the end of this round), the attacker may attempt a Coup De Grace—a long-lasting knockout to put the opponent totally out of commission. The attack is at -2, but if successful, the opponent must make a Very Difficult (Diff=25) BOD save (**Endurance** skill adds). If this roll fails, the opponent is unconscious; for every point by which he failed his BOD roll, the opponent is unconscious for one minute (6 rounds). If the opponent makes his BOD roll, just make a Stun Check as if it were a normal attack. Either way, a Coup De Grace does normal damage for the attack or weapon used for delivery. The danger of using

this method is that you don't always know exactly when the opponent is unconscious—every time this attack is used on an already-unconscious person, move the wound level up one category.

The Cruelest Cut: If you find yourself in a real fight, the last thing you worry about is the rules. Combat is a primal mode. People do stupid things like punching walls or pummeling an unconscious guy while somebody else sneaks up on them from behind. It's during these momentary slips that fights are won or lost. Anytime during a fight where the other person is either stunned or completely surprised (like an unsuspected attack from behind), any melee or hand-to-hand attack that scores will do maximum damage.

Instant Death Rules: Any time a Marital Artist with a skill of +2 or better (in any style with a strike or kick) or any person with a sharp or edged weapon faces an opponent who is stunned (meaning he was struck last round, and thus will be stunned until the at least the end of this round) or unconscious, the attacker may attempt an Instant Kill. This could be slitting the throat, breaking the neck, or whatever. The attacker's actions are at -2 (although he will usually succeed unless he also happens to be dodging). If the attacker succeeds, the opponent can make a Very Difficult (Diff=25) BOD roll (add **Endurance** skill). If the opponent fails, he's dead (Death State 1). If he succeeds, he takes maximum damage from the weapon or blow, which will probably kill anything but the hardiest combat monsters anyhow.

Using A Garrote: This requires either a surprise attack from behind or a successful grab or hold in the previous round. The opponent takes 1D6 points of damage per turn (plus Strength Bonus); hard armors with neck protection will completely prevent this attack (unless monowire is used) and soft armors will protect at 1/2 their SP.

NEW MARTIAL ARTS FORMS

ARASAKATE [1]

When Arasaka wanted to select a martial art to train its forces in, it selected leading hand-to-hand fighting experts to create the world's greatest martial art to date. After several years of development, Arasaka troops began to learn ArasakaTe. Several smash hit videos were made based on corporate Solos armed only with this martial art style, defeating opponents against all odds. Soon Arasaka-sponsored dojos began teaching ArasakaTe at reasonable rates. While this fighting form is widely respected, anyone who has any actual experience with ArasakaTe will tell you that it is a bland style made up of the easiest moves of seven different styles. Martial Arts designed by committees don't usually work too well.

GUN-FU [3]

This "style" is generally thought to be of Chinese origin. Developed as a system for more effective combat handgunnery within enclosed spaces, Gun-fu (sometimes known as Gunjitsu) is based on the concept of the handgun as an extension of the user's body. Within this martial art, the handgun is used like a melee weapon. Most commonly, the attacker will run right up to his opponent, shove his gun into the gonk's stomach, and pull the trigger as many times as it takes. The advantage to this is that gunshots delivered at point-blank range do MAXIMUM damage. The basic principle of Gun-fu (the handgun as a part of the body) also serves to increase firefight mobility. This martial art reduces the penalty for multiple actions by +1/4 skill level (round down); this means that a skill level of 1-3 grants no modifier, 4-7 grants +1 and 8-10 grants +2 (i.e., Gun-fu +8 only suffers -1 to multiple-action skill rolls). In this way, Gun-fu allows such

combination maneuvers as fast-draws, off-handed shooting, two-weapon attacks and firing while running or dodging to be carried out more effectively (note that these modifiers only apply to Point Blank or Close Range distances, and you still need to have a **Handgun** skill). Gun-fu is a very fast-paced, frantic combat style, requiring physical fitness and excellent shooting skills. It is a favorite of the Triads.

THAMOC [2]

Thamoc, or The Art of Modern Confrontation (or just The Art), was created at the end of the 20th century by the police departments around the world to train their officers in weapon retention skills. Unlike its predecessors, Thamoc stresses flexibility right before impact. Weapon retention is achieved by use of stances that allow for the maximum distance between your weapon and your opponent (that is, until you attack). This skill works equally well with handguns, knives and other small melee weapons. In game terms, this style gives the user a defense against a Disarm attack at Thamoc Skill level +4! Remember, you still need **Handgun** or **Melee** skill to use the weapons themselves. Due to its defensive nature, Thamoc cannot be used at the same time as Gun-fu.

THRASH BOXING [2]

Like Capoeria, this form integrates dance movements into a powerful fighting style. This martial art grew up in the nightclub environment where chromergangs (de)evolved dance contests into flashy rituals of intimidation (use Face-Off/Reputation rules) and brutality. After a while, these rituals coalesced into an effective combat style. The key attacks of Thrash Boxing include tight, straight punches, contrasted by extravagant flying jump kicks. Special moves assume that the usual fighting environment is the dance floor; for example, performing a running slide on the slippery floor surface that ends in a sweep kick.

MARTIAL ARTS FORMS & SPECIALIZATION TABLE

STYLE & DIFFICULTY LEVEL	STRIKE	KICK	BLOCK	DODGE	THROW	HOLD	ESCAPE	CHOKE	SWEEP	GRAPPLE
Arasaka-Te (1)	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1	+2	-	+1
Gun-Fu (3)	—	—	+2	+4	—	—	+2	—	+3	+4
Thrash Boxing (3)	+2	+3	—	+1	+1	—	+2	—	+3	—
Thamoc (2)	—	—	+1	+2	—	—	+2	—	+1	+1

BEYOND THE BASICS

This list pinpoints those skills and special abilities not covered in the basic Cyberpunk 2020 rules.

SKILL NAME (IP MOD)	BASE STAT	REFERENCE LOCATION
Administrator Resources	Special Ability	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 44
Area Knowledge	INT	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 48
Astrogation	INT	*Near Orbit*, pg. 44; *Deep Space*, pg. 76
BioTech (+15)	TECH	*Eurosource* pg. 43
Brotherhood (Space)	Special Ability	*Near Orbit*, pg. 43; *Deep Space*, pg. 75
Bureaucracy	INT	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 48
Business Sense	INT	*Solo of Fortune*, pg. 31
Braindance Use	INT	*Deep Space*, pg. 74
CitySpeak	INT	*Interface V1-#1*, pg. 20
Combat Sense Specialization	Optional Special Ability	*Home of the Brave*, pg. 74
Con	Special Ability	*Wildside*, pg. 36; *When Gravity Fails*, pg. 48.
Corporate Policy	INT	*Solo of Fortune*, pg. 31
Culture	INT	*Wildside*, pg. 86 replaces *Chrome Book 1*, pg. 74
Culture	COOL	*Solo of Fortune*, pg.31 is replaced by Expert (Pop Culture)
Cadre Tactics	COOL	*Interface V1-#2*, pg. 23
ECM	INT	*Interface V1-#2*, pg. 23
EVA	REF	*Near Orbit*, pg. 43; *Deep Space*, pg. 76
Expert: Law	INT	*Protect and Serve*, pg. 70
Gang Rank	Special Ability	*Wildside*, pg. 37 and *Solo of Fortune*, pg. 19
Hand Jive	INT	*Wildside*, pg. 84.
Indirect Fire	Spotter's (Heavy Wep.+ INT)/2 Gunner's Heavy Weapons /2	*Maximum Metal*, pg. 8
Municipal Commo	TECH	*Interface V2-#1*, pg. 9
Navigate	INT	*Hardwired*, pg. 21
OTV Pilot	REF	*Near Orbit*, pg. 44; *Deep Space*, pg. 76
PA Combat sense	Special Ability	*Maximum Metal*, pg. 52
PA Pilot (2)	REF	*Maximum Metal*, pg. 53
PA Tech (3)	TECH	*Maximum Metal*, pg. 52
Pilot Remote (3)	Average REF and INT	*Chrome Book 2*, pg. 30
	REF	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 49
Pilot (Ship) (2)	INT	*Home of the Brave*, pg. 75
Reason	Special Ability	*Protect and Serve*, pg. 70
Research (P.I.)	Special Ability	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 46
Sailpower	INT	*Hardwired*, pg. 21
Seamanship	INT	*Hardwired*, pg. 21
Scrounge	Special Ability	*Wildside*, pg. 37
Simper	EMP	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 48
Sneak	Special Ability	*Wildside*, pg. 35
Space Plane/Shuttle Pilot	REF	*Near Orbit*, pg. 44; *Deep Space*, pg. 76
Space Survival	INT	*Near Orbit*, pg. 44; *Deep Space*, pg. 76
Spy (Chameleon)	Special Ability	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 47
Street Tactics	Special Ability	*Interface V1-#1*, pg. 21,44
Survival (environment)	INT	*Hardwired*, pg. 21
SCUBA	TECH	*Interface V1-#1*, pg. 40,44
Submersible Pilot (2)	INT	*Interface V1-#1*, pg. 40,44
Submersible Tech (2)	TECH	*Interface V1-#1*, pg. 40,44
Tactics	INT	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 48
Thief	Special Ability	*Interface V1-#1*, pg. 20,44
Underwater Combat	Special Ability	*Interface V1-#1*, pg. 40,44
Underwater Equipment	TECH	*Interface V1-#1*, pg. 40,44
Urban Survival	INT	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 48
Vamp	Special Ability	*Wildside*, pg. 37
Vehicle Zen	Special Ability	*When Gravity Fails*, pg. 45
Water Vehicles	INT or REF (GM choice)	*Eurosource*, pg. 50
Wetware Design	TECH	*Wildside*, pg. 21
Workganger (Family)	Special Ability	*Near Orbit*, pg. 43; *Deep Space*, pg. 75
Zero Gee Combat	REF	*Near Orbit*, pg. 13; *Deep Space*, pg. 76
Zero Gee Maneuver	REF	*Near Orbit*, pg. 13; *Deep Space*, pg. 76

THE COMPLETE ROLE LIST

T hese are the various roles people play in life, with the special abilities in parentheses. Sub-roles are listed after the main entry (this includes the "alternative" skill packages, but not the "subordinate/supporting" ones from *Interface*). The numbered footnotes identifiy which supplement the role(s) came from.

ADMINISTRATOR (Admin Resources)[9]

ATTORNEY (Reason): Judge[6]

CONFIDENCE MAN (Con)[10]

CONVICT (Thief)[13]

COP (Authority)[1/6]: CIA[2] LawDiv[6], Interpol[2/5]

CORPORATE (Resources)[1]

DANCER/PROSTITUTE [STRIPPER] (Vamp)[9/10]

GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL (Resources)[16]

FIXER (Streetdeal)[1]: Salesman[10/14], Moneybags[10], Leech[10/14], Go-Between[10/14], Mobster[10/14]

SPACE PILOT (Brotherhood)[4]: Highrider[16]

INMATE PENAL CORPS MEMBER (Street Tactics)[13]

SPACE MARINE (Space Combat)[4]

MEDIA (Credibility)[1]: Investigative Reporter[17], Sensationalist[17], War Correspondent[17], Tabloid Media[17], Lawyer[18]

MEDTECHIE (Medical Tech)[1]

MODEL (Pose)[1]

NETRUNNER (Interface)[1]: Rogue Hunter[15]

NOMAD (Family)[1]: Freight Maverick[16], Pirate[8/16], Wild Packer[16]

OCEAN CITIZEN (Underwater Combat)[13]

PRIVATE EYE (Research)[8/9]

PROWLER (Sneak)[10]

RUNNER/JOCKEY (Vehicle Zen)[9]: DeltaJock[8], PanzerBoy[8]

ROCKER (Charismatic Leadership)[1]: Performance Artist[3], Politician[3], Social Leader/Activist[3], Street Poet[3], Clergyman/Cult Leader[18]

SALVER (Salvage)[4]

SOLO (Combat Sense)[1]: Street Samurai[2/15], Bodyguard[2/15], Bounty Hunter[2/15], Corporate Operative[2/15], Cybersoldier[2/15], EuroSolo[2/5], Specialist[2], CIA/KGB/Mossad Agent[2], Army/Navy/Marine/Air Force Soldier[7], Ninja[6]

SPY (Chameleon)[9]

STREETPUNK (Gang Rank)[2/10/16]

SCAVENGER (Scrounge)[10]

TECHIE (Jury Rig)[1]

TROOPER (P.A. Combat)[12]

VAGRANT (Urban Survival)[9/11]

WORKGANGER (Workgang)[4]

FOOTNOTES

1: *Cyberpunk 2020*

2: *Solo of Fortune*

3: *Rockerboy*

4: *Near Orbit or Deep Space*

5: *Eurosource*

6: *Protect & Serve*

7: *Home of the Brave*

8: *Hardwired*

9: *When Gravity Fails*

10: *Wildside*

11: *Corporation Book 3*

12: *Maximum Metal*

13: *Interface Vol 1, #1*

14: *Interface Vol 1, #2*

15: *Interface Vol 1, #3*

16: *Interface Vol 1, #4*

17: *Interface Vol 2, #1*

18: *Interface Vol 2, #2*

REF/BIO FILE

SPYKE! REF/BIO

Ross Winn (aka Spyke!) lives in St. Petersburg, Florida, commonly referred to as "God's Waiting Room." He has a great wife, Laura, one daughter, Whitney, and two dogs, Elvis and Tyler. He smokes too much, and exercises too little.

Ross began tormenting the staff of RTG almost four years ago. He has run tournaments for *Cyberpunk* (both 2013 and 2020), written for *Chromebook 2*, *Maximum Metal*, *Home of the Brave*, and pontificated massively on the *Referee's Guide*. He has also written several useless term papers (not even remotely publishable) and not much else.

He cites A. Toffler, W. Gibson, D.K. Moran, and K.W. Jeter as his cyberpunk influences, along with *Ministry*, *Nine Inch Nails* and *Siouxsie & the Banshees*.

BENJAMIN L. WRIGHT REF/BIO

Benjamin (never Ben) is a New York-er born and bred. He graduated from the University of Rochester with a degree in Film Studies and now resides in San Francisco's Bay Area. As an aficionado of cyberpunk literature and an anime admirer, R. Talsorian seemed the logical choice for a company to harass until they'd hire him. It worked. Having contributed to both *Chromebooks*, done illustrations for *Mekton* and finally writing *Wildside*, he's now suffering as the New Kid on the RTG Block.

Why the *Referee's Guide*? Because it needed to be done. Benjamin has refereed and played almost nothing but RTG's games (mainly *Cyberpunk*) for about five years and he feels eminently qualified to tell other people how to play his favorite RPG. You're smart enough to decide for yourself if he's right.

CHARLIE WONG REF/BIO

Bom and raised in the Greater Boston area, my first roleplaying experience was in 5th grade when a *Monster Manual* given as a birthday present sent me and all my friends into gaming. Since then I have moved to newer and better systems. My current favorites are *Champions* and RTG's *Interlock*.

I am a partner in my own computer consulting company which serves many small businesses in my area. I am an avid reader of science fact/fiction and comic books. I love the cyberpunk and sword & sorcery genres, but read very little in them, preferring to stay on the fringe looking in. This is my first published game material.

CRAIG SHEELEY REF/BIO

This fellow began his plummet into insanity in 1973 when he started playing wargames. Of course, he was never normal to begin with, so this didn't startle anybody. He discovered role-playing in 1977 with *D&D* and *Traveller*. In order to sustain the habit, he started writing about games in the 80s, beginning with reviews in the old *Space Gamer* and proceeding to generate a pile of *Car Wars* material (*Midwest Road Atlas, Aeroduel, Car Wars Tanks, Uncle Al's Catalog from Hell*), as well as doing work for *Tales of the Floating Vagabond, Dark Conspiracy, Twilight: 2000, GURPS*, and of course, *Cyberpunk 2020*.

So what is this maniac doing on this project? As a combat nut and wargamer, who better to handle the combat section? And as a professional griper (that's what a reviewer is, folks), he wanted to kvetch on a couple of other topics, too.

ERIC HEISSERER REF/BIO

Well. Hmm. Gee. I can ramble on about *Cyberpunk* roleplaying and refing for hours, but I get tongue-tied when asked to write about myself. What is worth mentioning? I'm a devoted writer of the genre. I've written two modules for *CP2020*, and I'm working on two more. I'm also in the development stages of a novel and a jigsaw puzzle. Here's a brief Lifepath...

1983: *Make a friend*—am introduced to roleplaying in my Oklahoma home town with the grandfather of all RPG's, *D&D*.

1984: *Make a new friend*—quickly moved on to a new system: *Champions*. Lingered there for years; new games/themes were just 'translated' into the Hero system.

1990: *Fast affairs & hot dates*—this year I experimented with all kinds of role-playing systems: *GURPS, Call of Cthulhu, Shadowrun, Chill, Rifts*, etc.

1991: *Disaster Strikes!* Addiction—after hopping from game to game, I dropped them all and devoted myself to *Shadowrun*. I was enthralled with the concept, and loved the cybertech. However, system problems and arguments about magic theory killed my love—I was a man with no game.

1992: *Happy love affair*—after a gaming hiatus, I joined a *Cyberpunk* con game. It was love at first playtest. I found a local group and spent my weekends on the streets of Night City. I also tried my hand at Ref-ing and started with an underwater adventure, "*The Bonin Horse.*" For kicks, I submitted it to RTG. They handed it over to Atlas Games, and I waited.

1993: *Out-of-state game designers befriend you*—this was the big year. *Bonin Horse* was accepted and released in June; I finished another adventure soon after for release in '94. I married a non-gamer as my link to the outside world. RTG's chief editor called me up one day and said "how would you like to spend time on the soapbox and speak your mind about *Cyberpunk* gaming?" My first question was "you want to pay me for this??" Sure enough, he was serious. And here it is. Enjoy.

MIKE PONDSMITH REF/BIO

The master of the RTG madhouse, Mike Pondsmith broke into the gaming world with the long-forgotten (hopefully) "White-Box" edition of *Mekton*, the Japanimation Robot Combat and Role-Paying Game in 1984. As the decade has passed, he has continued to stun and amaze gamers and designers alike with his traveling road show of tricks: *Mekton II, Teenagers from Outer Space, Cyberpunk, Dream Park*

(the game), *CyberGeneration*, and *Castle Falkenstien.* (we could go on and on, but as this is being ghost-written, he can blow his own horn on his own time…). However, if you want to make him humble, just mention his other long-forgotten project: the *Buck Rogers* roleplaying game for TSR.

His current major in-studio project is the raising of Cody, (his new son), whom

he describes as "a single major release, in black and white, with plenty of expansions and very expensive add-on modules." No sequel is currently planned.

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